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American Rush.

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# AMERICAN PUSH.

BY

EDGAR FAWCETT.



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# AMERICAN PUSH.

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## I.

ALL day the wind had stung as it blew beneath a sky of slate. Even Gramercy Park looked bleak and cheerless while a brougham of elegant trim, with two liveried men on its box, rattled up to the door of a mansion just south of Irving Place. The inmate, a young man, wrapped to his ears in a huge coat lined with sable, remained inside his carriage until the footman's bell-ring had been answered. Then he lightly bounded forth upon the pavement, and ran up the stoop into the open doorway, which was immediately closed behind him by another footman inside the hall.

"Is everything ready, Jameson?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man, as his young master slipped out of the coat and let its big, sumptuous bulk drop into this third servant's waiting arms. A large mirror gleamed opposite the form which had thus lightly unsheathed itself, and its possessor, Alonzo Lispenard, gave a saucy stare at his own presentment. He saw a man in the later twenties, of excellent height and build, though of meager personal beauty. Bronze eyes, with a merry spark in them, and waved hair of silky yellow, did their best to keep

the face from being commonplace. An impudent nose somewhat aided it — a nose with an airy upward slant and little arches to flank either nostril. Some of Alonzo's friends used to say that this feature accounted for many of his audacities.

"Oh, I think I'll do," he exclaimed, half to himself and half, as it were, to Jameson, who grinned serenely. "If they don't like me this way they'll have to take me, all the same." He wheeled round on one heel and hurried to the staircase. He had reached the middle of it, taking two steps at a time, when he suddenly paused, and called over one shoulder :

"Oh, Jameson, are the carpet and the awning out there ? I forgot to notice."

"No, sir, not yet. But they're sure to be in time, Mr. Lispenard."

Alonzo fronted the speaker, and shook with vehemence an upraised forefinger. "Now, Jameson," he cried, "if anything goes wrong to-day you'll not forget it till your dying hour. To say that you'll merely be discharged, isn't anything. I'll have you traced by detectives to the uttermost parts of the earth, and the instant you try to get a new place, they'll prevent you."

He sprang upstairs again, still two steps at a time, while Jameson watched him with eyes that twinkled fondly. Just as he disappeared, the new English valet, Fletcher, sauntered from back regions. This person had a sneer on his clean-shorn upper lip as he muttered to Jameson :

"Well, if he *ain't* one o' the reg'lar bloomin', lah-de-dah, strike-ye-with-a-feather kind! I wonder how you could stand him for so long a time. I begin to be pretty sure that I can't."

Jameson colored and scowled. He greatly liked his young master. To new eyes and ears Alonzo's manner was no doubt effeminate. He often chose to use the treble notes of a voice that was not devoid of bass ones, and he gave to his body a too mercurial twirl, to his shoulders a too facile shrug. His laugh had sometimes a girl's own shrillness, and he sometimes used his hands in gestures that were so many challenges to dignity. But those who knew him best knew him for an athlete of skill, a rider of pluck, a keen sportsman when laziness let him shoot or hunt, and a mental force replete with every opposite of womanish trends and tastes.

The new valet had been in office hardly a week yet, and here was not the first slur that his fellow-servants had heard fall from his lips. He had chosen a dangerous atmosphere in which to vent his aversion, and this fact was soon made clear to him in no careful terms. "Look out, my young sprig o' conceit," growled Jameson, whose gray-touched little thickets of side-whisker seemed to bristle as he spoke, "or you'll find that the gent you've engaged with 'll send you flyin' before you've had the chance to give warnin'. And without a rec'mendation, too. Yes, sir, you needn't look sour and uppish. Mr. Lispenard won't mind that. If you take him for what you've just

called him you'll get so left you won't know Monday from Saturday week."

The new valet (who was thought to wear stays) put a neat white hand on either hip. He had been in this country three or four years, and had learned not to squander his h's. But in the excitement of repartee he now forsook a few of them. With "bloomin'," "blarsted," and an occasional "bloody" as his recurrent adjectives, he declared himself anxious to learn of Jameson why he so admired Mr. Lispenard. And Jameson swiftly told him.

"He's got his harum-scarum ways," announced the butler, in tart semitone, "but he's every inch a gentleman behind 'em. His foolin's only like the white of an egg with a big yelk to it. When I was sick in the hospital, two years ago, he went to see me twice a week, and put me in a room that must 'a' cost him a hundred dollars a month if it cost a cent. The man that was here just before you, got drunk three times, and was forgiven, and at last, when the rascal stole a scarf-pin worth seventy dollars, he had to pack, but Mr. Lispenard shook him by the hand—yes, sir—before he quitted these doors with his dirty feet, and told him that he hoped with all his soul not goin' to prison this time would teach him a lesson for the rest of his life. Think o' *that*, when the police was spoilin' for the mean devil, and Mr. Lispenard could 'a' had him sent up by the wave of a finger! . . . And he gives to the poor! Lord, sir! I've seen him bring tramps into this very hall that made me itch to look at 'em. And I don't itch easy, neither,"

pursued Jameson, with a fresh scowl meant to be deeply august in its convincing agency. . . .

Meanwhile, the object of this eulogium (which went flowing on, to the mingled surprise and amusement of its hearer) had reached the drawing-rooms on the higher floor and had paused there, surveying their quiet splendors. There were three rooms in all, the first and second spacious, the third a little smaller, being in fact a dining-room, but large enough for a good-sized throng to feast in, as many a good-sized throng had done. Their curtains had been drawn; the clusters of side-lights had been lit. There was no profusion of ornament. You had a sense of heavy falling tapestries, of occasional pictures, each in itself a gem-like masterpiece, of cushions piled in alcoves, of just a few white-glimmering bits of sculpture; of an exquisite little antique head here and a bit of choice Japanese enameling there. But no huddled masses offended the eye, which roved easily from one point of elegance to the next, finding nothing inferior, nothing with the faintest tarnish of cheapness.

Alonzo had just stooped to bury his nose in a huge basket of fresh violets, when a voice from a near alcove called to him :

“For Heaven’s sake, go and dress !”

Alonzo gave a sharp start. “Good gracious, Phil, is that you ?”

“Yes,” replied Philip Lexington, rearranging a cushion to suit his shoulder-blades. “I found you out, drifted upstairs, got hold of this revolting French

book, and have wallowed in its corruption ever since. I really should think, Lonz," he continued, with an autocratic little pull at one end of the dark mustache which so well became his olive and oval face, "that in your French reading you might draw the line *somewhere*."

"I draw it at just such abominations," returned Alonzo. "True, the leaves of that horror were cut, but they've only been skimmed, and not all of them, either."

Rising on the great, deep couch of tufted silk, Lexington drew out his watch. "Well, more shame for me, I've actually spent half-an-hour with it. And, my dear boy, you'll forgive me for making myself so terribly at home in your absence, won't you, now?"

"That's what you're always saying," laughed his host, "and you're always forgiven, and there's never anything to forgive." Here Alonzo threw himself into a chair. "By the way, you're to be my best man next April, if you will. *Will* you?"

Lexington's dark face flushed a little. "*Will* I? Thanks, immensely, Lonz. I—I thought you'd ask Winthrop Delavan."

"Did you? Well, you see I haven't. So you accept?"

"Accept! Is there a man you know that wouldn't be delighted?"

"Oh, don't put it that way."

"But I do put it that way," persisted Lexington. He left the alcove, and dropped into a great satin

easy-chair near Alonzo, wheeling it still nearer. He was of good family, good position, but he had the reputation of being a snob, who only courted the rich and socially powerful. He possessed a very small income, and was a notorious idler. Alonzo had made him several large loans during the past few years, and not a dime had yet been returned. Society, however, had no shred of proof that this was true. But it criticised the intimacy, and drew its own rather cynical deductions.

"I often tell myself, old fellow," Lexington went on, "that you're the most modest man in creation. Who you are quite escapes you, and as for what you are—an artist of splendid talents—you never seem to give it a thought."

"*Who I am?*" came the airy reply. "Oh, in the name of common-sense, Phil, don't try to gammon me by any suggestion that I'm anybody from the patrician point of view. Kitty and I came of respectable stock, that's all, and you know it as well as I do. When your ancestors, the Lexingtons, were swells in New York a hundred years ago, mine, the Lispenards, were probably carpenters, grocers, perhaps even bricklayers. I had a lucky father, who founded a big banking-house, and educated his two children. If there were any real aristocracy in this funny, pretentious town, I wouldn't have the ghost of a claim to call myself a part of it. I'm no more a Knickerbocker than I'm a Carolus Duran or a Bonnat."

"You're a very powerful artist, though," insisted Lexington.

"Bosh, my boy ! I've got a little talent and a tremendous amount of ambition. If I'd been born poor and obscure, my present employment would no doubt have been one of picturesque starvation."

Lexington heaved a reproachful little sigh. "Then you think I praise you," he began, sadly, "for no other reason than because"——

Alonzo jumped up from his chair and caught his friend's hand between both his own. "I don't think anything so nasty of you !" he cried, in the shrill, eccentric voice he sometimes used. "Come up into the studio, and let's look at *her* picture. I gave it a few fresh touches this morning. I suppose they're the last. But I've been saying that (idiot that I am !) ever since her final sitting, which was two weeks ago yesterday."

He shot out of the room at his usual brisk amble, and Lexington followed him. . . . The studio, a great northern chamber, blazed with gorgeousness. Through an immense window the light poured upon yards of costly tissues and hundreds of curios. On an easel was the portrait to which Alonzo had just referred. He stood staring at it for several moments with folded arms.

"Dear old Eric Thaxter !" he said. "You always told me the truth. You swore I could only paint about one good picture every five years, and I believe you were right. — Was there *ever* such a slow coach ?"



"Eric Thaxter?" muttered Lexington. "I remember him at school in Vevey."

"We afterward studied together at the same *atelier* in Paris. Eric wasn't cut out for a painter, perhaps, but he's done wonders over there as an architect. See this." . . . And he handed Lexington a letter. "He's drifted into the good graces of the young King of Saltravia; he's built a new royal palace, which they say is a grand success."

"And he's very anxious for you to come on and make him a visit," said Lexington, while scanning the letter.

"Oh, yes. He thinks me a wonderful art-critic, though the completest failure as a painter."

"How obliging of him," said Lexington, coldly. He had for some time felt a vague jealousy of this Eric Thaxter, whom Alonzo would so often mention, even amid the flurry and whirl of the life he led.

"Read on, Phil, and you'll see. Eric thinks there's no one with such a *flair* as I for what's genuine in art. The young King, who is absurdly rich considering the smallness of his realm, is anxious for somebody to prowl through the old Italian monasteries and exhume forgotten masterpieces, besides buying at modern sales everything that shows transcendent merit."

"And actually he thinks you would accept such a position as that!" sneered Lexington. "Upon my word, Lonz, it strikes me as almost an insult. Does your friend suggest any salary?"

Alonzo suppressed a yawn. "No. I dare say the

grandeur of knowing His Majesty would be thought sufficient."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, come, now," cried Alonzo, slapping his friend on the shoulder, "it's all only a little scheme on Eric's part to have me go over and hobnob with him in Saltravia."

"And so he baits his invitation with the prospect of meeting a king."

"Oh, poor, dear Eric! Not at all. I don't doubt he's aware I've met several." Here Alonzo began to count with one hand on the outspread fingers of the other. "They've all been so nice to me, too. Let me think. First, there was the Prince, in London, year before last. But, no . . . he isn't a king, is he?"

"Oh, he'll pass for one. I remember, you saw him a lot of times."

"Through Daisy Bostwick, you know. She and I were such tremendous chums before she married."

"Daisy Bostwick," smiled Lexington. "That's American, I suppose, for the Marchioness of Middlesex."

"Yes, I've played more than one game of poker at the Middlesexes' in Grosvenor Square, with H. R. H. . . . Then there was Umberto, at Rome. Of course he was nice to me because he and the Queen both adore Bessie Southgate, who used to go to school with my sister Kitty, and is now the Princess Carrioli; and Bessie was simply sweet to us the minute she heard we were in Rome. And . . . let me think; haven't I any more royalties to brag

about? Yes, there was the King of Servia, whom I took supper with in Paris, year before last, and — oh, I'd forgotten — I was presented in Berlin, the same year, at a great ball somewhere, to the Emperor of Ger — But no; he wasn't Emperor then; he was only Crown Prince. So my list is a pretty small one, after all, isn't it?"

"It's large enough for you to snap your fingers at a minor potentate like the King of Saltravia. . . . By the way, Lonz, your people will soon be arriving. Why *don't* you dress?"

"Dress?" cried Alonzo, lifting both hands and whirling himself round while he surveyed his attire. "Isn't this good enough, in the name of sanity?"

"In the name of decency," replied Lexington, "it isn't. A velveteen sack-coat and a big tempestuous-looking neck-tie of brick-dust red silk! It won't do at all. You've lots of swagger afternoon things. Ring for your man, and make him put you into one of your new London suits. It's positively shameful that you should go down-stairs in those Bohemian togs. Your sister, Mrs. Van Santvoord, will be furious."

"Oh, Kitty's always grumbling at me. I don't mind *her*."

"But this is the first home entertainment you've given to Miss Kennaird."

"True," said Alonzo, while his rattling manner seemed to soften. "But, my dear Phil," he suddenly resumed, throwing back his head, and making flighty gestures with both hands, "if there's one thing that dear Kathleen of mine likes about me, it's to have me

be myself. True, she's conventional enough ; but, ah ! when I think of that adorable girl, she reconciles me to all the sham and trash of the life we live and the way we live it."

Lexington furtively gnawed his lip. He had his own secret cynical ideas about the sincerity of this new sweetheart whom his young millionaire friend had chosen.

"Oh, well," he returned, rather grimly, "if you want to defy convention, it doesn't matter. You're so popular that you can. Nobody minds. They all accept you, and like you the better for being yourself, since it's yourself they're so fond of."

"Fond !" echoed Alonzo, and with so harshly unwonted a ring in his voice that it made his hearer start and stare. He let his flexible frame sink down on the broad arm of an easy-chair near which he had been standing, and his tawny eyes had never shone with stronger seriousness than while he now continued to speak.

"You good, kind-hearted Phil ! Don't you see that my popularity is the merest myth ? When I do bold or queer things, it isn't I whom they laugh at and make believe that they think funny ; it's a fellow with a few thousands a year that he squanders on their amusement. Let fate strip me of those, Phil, and they'd think me as ordinary as their morning bath. I don't want to be a cynic, and, if I did, there are some few things that would save me from it. You're one of them"——

I ?"

"Yes. You ring right, somehow — at least, to my ears you do!"

"Thanks."

"And then, there's Kathleen. Ah, *she* rings right! She's like a perpetual chime of silver bells."

"Which you will soon turn into wedding-bells."

"In April, my boy. . . . You remember, Phil, how I hated the thought of marriage till I met her. Then everything changed. I felt like a transformation scene in a pantomime. That big, solid lump of prejudice in me gave a sort of click, and there it was, a church-altar, with a clergyman or two behind it, looking round to see whom they could marry. . . . And do you know why that lovely girl has captured me? Because I believe she's without one speck of sham. It isn't her beauty, or her brains, or her power of charming you — for she's got all three. It's her mighty genuineness, Phil. She often seems to me, beside the women I meet her with, like a live flower that's lost its way among a basket of false ones. Her petals (the darling!) were not purchased at a fancy-shop. They came fresh from the loom of Nature, who spun them with her heart in her work. I find there's so much in that, by the bye. Nature's made such crowds and crowds of us not caring whether Brown was to be a poet or a politician, Jones a deacon or a dentist. It's only when she goes to work in dead earnest that she turns out her magnificent men and women." He clasped both hands together with a fervor that in almost any one else

would have been solely comic. "And Kathleen Kennaird is one of the last!"

"I wonder," said Lexington, dryly, and yet with a polite air of venture, "whether you have any feelings of this sort about Mrs. Kennaird, her mother."

Alonzo broke into a high and hearty laugh. "She's worldliness itself!" he cried. "Who doubts it? But she's a very picturesque figure. I like to look at her. She sweeps through life so. Her chief idea of being happy is to don a new gown and 'meet people.' She's tremendous as an incarnate idea. I should like to paint her as that. If I only could! It would be a great picture. Her eye-glasses would be half lifted, and her head would be a good deal thrown back, and there would be billows of silk or satin below her waist, and she would have her arms and neck bared, for they're really superb, and—Well, Fletcher." The last two words were addressed to his valet, who had just appeared at the open doorway. Guests had begun to arrive, and Alonzo hastened down-stairs to receive them. Almost the first greeting he received was one from his sister, Mrs. Van Santvoord. "Lonz," she said, "what on earth do you mean by turning up in that scandalous coat?"

"It isn't scandalous, Kitty; it's representative." He appealed, in his least reposeful style, to a great lady of fashion who stood at his sister's side. "I'm issuing an edict," he went on, with that kind of intimate and hysteric loquacity by which he had contrived to shock and yet to amuse many associates,

"I intend saying, 'Let there be velvet coats at afternoon teas,' and there shall be velvet coats."

The lady, a handsome brunette, *grande dame* to her finger-tips, gave an obstinate shake of her neat-bonneted head.

"No," she declared. "I, for one, sha'n't agree to any rule so rowdy."

"Rowdy!" shouted Alonzo. He caught one of her gloved hands and peered into her face with his eyes quizzically twinkling. "Lily, you're a horrid thing, and I'll never be friends with you any more. You don't love me, Lily. You know you don't!"

It was the madness of silliness, and impertinence as well. Lilian Poughkeepsie was one of the leaders of the most exclusive set. People rarely addressed her except in terms of strictest courtesy, and her social nod was potent enough to unbar for a struggler the gilded and filigreed gates of the Four Hundred.

Mrs. Van Santvoord, who revered Mrs. Poughkeepsie's position, drew back with a gasp of "Oh, Alonzo, how *can* you?"

Mrs. Poughkeepsie remained speechless, with hardening face. But Alonzo didn't mind that. "You see," he exclaimed, appealing to his sister. "Lily *doesn't* love me, and I'm going to receive everybody else in my shirt-sleeves." He took off the velvet coat and bundled it under one arm. "This," he continued, "is to be my despairing posture for the rest of the afternoon." He struck so ridiculous an attitude that Mrs. Poughkeepsie burst into an unwilling scream of mirth. She forgave him, just as everybody else did.

—just as he had been forgiven last week at a very select cotillon for pretending drunkenness, and tumbling flat on his back in the middle of the ball-room. And now, while he was re-clothing himself, a number of people pressed about him, principally ladies, inquiring what his last madness had meant, and prepared to roar with laughter at it before they had heard it explained.

But a little group remained apart, and in this was a young man who detested him, though glad enough to appear at his festal summons.

"Oh, it's only some new caddish prank," said the young man. "He's always behaving like that."

"But he wakes people up so," said a girl who was not a belle and to whom he had been kind.

"You wouldn't say that of *me*," replied the young man, "if *I* were to carry on so outrageously."

The girl gave a pout and a toss of the head. "You're not Alonzo Lispenard," she retorted.

"You mean that I haven't got two millions of dollars," whispered the young man in her ear, "and that I can't throw away fifty thousand every year of my life in dinners and dances and frolics for my friends."

The girl chose to ignore this burst of bitterness. "Look," she said. "There's Miss Kennaird, just coming in with her mother. How sobered he gets as he goes to greet her. They say she doesn't approve of his larking style."

"Well she may not. How beautiful she is."

"Do you think so?" shrugged the girl. "She's



too tall, for my taste, and then I "don't like her eyes. They're like ice."

"Blue ice — or green, if you please — with a blaze of sun on it. Besides, the long curls of their black lashes help them so. And she has a face as delicate as an orchid."

"How can she wear that black velvet trimmed with sables?" pursued the girl. "They say these Kennairds have but four thousand a year to live on."

"Oh, make it five."

"Nobody really knows *just* how much. But still, they're *poor*. Do you suppose it's possible that . . ." And here the girl lowered her voice, which a sweet clash of hidden violins would in any case have drowned an instant later.

Kathleen Kennaird smiled right and left, but it seemed to certain observers that her manner toward her accepted suitor was peculiarly cold. This little afternoon tea, as he chose to call it, was given in her honor. Not more than thirty people had been asked, and those were the ones Kathleen had specially desired. Tea, it is true, was served in the most exquisite porcelain cups; but this potion proved, as it were, only an excuse for other refreshments. Almost before they knew it the guests found themselves seated at little tables, eating terrapin and sipping frozen champagne. Then, in a short while, a soprano voice was heard, singing from *Tristan*. "That's Lili Lehmann, or I'll be shot," presently muttered Lexington, who knew nothing of this surprise, so characteristic of Alonzo; and soon the great

singer appeared, conducted by the host himself, her beautiful face wreathed in smiles. Nearly all the women crowded about her with cries of gratulation and welcome. Amid the general clamor Kathleen Kennaird took the chance of saying to her lover:

"You have been doing another wild thing."

"What *do* you mean?" he queried, with infantile innocence.

"Oh, last night at the Merrymakers' Club. You'll not deny, surely, that you blacked your face and went in at dessert to the large dinner Harry Madison was giving, as a negro banjo-player; and that nobody found you out until a wisp of your light hair happened to show under your wig."

"That's really delicious!" Alonzo said. "My face was no more blacked than yours is now —and Heaven knows there are roses and lilies enough *there*! I'd promised to be at the dinner, and reached the Merry-makers' shamefully late. So I sent from the club for my banjo (which, by the way, I detest as an instrument, and play horribly) merely for the purpose . . ."

Kathleen shook her head in a deploring way as he paused. "For the purpose of doing something horribly odd," she said. "Confess it; you may as well."

"But the blacking of the face is all nonsense. Johnny Chadwick got me a black mask from one of the waiters. I dare say it had been worn at some servants' masked ball, and happened to be lying about somewhere in the club. I put it on after sending for the banjo. It was all Johnny's idea — not the banjo, but the mask. I merely wanted to go into the dinner

With a little music, as I'd got there so scandalously late. Everything else that you've heard is the sheepest rubbish."

Kathleen laid a slim-gloved hand on his arm. "Well, well," she faltered. "Allow that you were maligned that time, Alonzo. But your taking off your coat a few minutes before mamma and I appeared! Oh, I heard of it; never mind who told me. And these dreadful escapades of yours get into the newspapers. They must stop — out of respect to me, Alonzo, they *should* stop! You cheapen yourself by indulging in them! No one likes you the better for them, and things are said behind your back which you do not realize, because you trust your friends so implicitly."

"I don't trust many friends, Kathleen," came the low-voiced answer. "But I do trust *you*, and . . . you're the only real friend I have in the world. Now, believe me, there *shall* be a reformation. From this moment I promise one. When you marry me, next April, you shall marry a man who hasn't kicked up his heels for weeks."

The music burst forth again as Alonzo finished speaking. When the revelers were invited to reënter the two front drawing-rooms, chairs had been arranged for a cotillon. Philip Lexington led the dance with Mrs. Van Santvoord, at Alonzo's request. Through the first figure the participants imagined that it was only an impromptu dance. But suddenly they were called upon to take it more seriously, since, before the first figure ended, bouquets of the rarest flow-

ers had begun to circulate, and by six o'clock, when the final strains of the musicians were sounding, jeweled fans had been lavished on the ladies for favors, and the gentlemen had received cat's-eye scarf-pins set round with tiny pearls.

It had all been a sumptuous and yet charmingly tasteful tribute to the sweetheart of the host. People pressed Alonzo's hand in their ardent praise of his festivity, and told him that the entertainment had been a blended astonishment and delight. Mrs. Kennaird, who had not danced, but who had watched the cotillon, with her grand air at its grandest, whispered to her prospective son-in-law, just as he was slipping from the room, having in his hand a card which a servant had lately given him: "Your tribute to dear Kathleen has been perfectly enchanting."

"So glad you liked it, so glad," returned Alonzo, as he receded from the lofty lady's view. . . .

The card which he held was from his uncle, Mr. Crawford Lispenard, head of the great banking-house of Lispenard & Chichester.

"My dear Uncle Crawford!" he said, grasping the hand of a big man with iron-gray side-whiskers, who stood in the hall; "we meet so seldom, but, when we do meet, it shouldn't be like this. . . . I know you hate society, dear old boy; still, you'll come up and see my sweetheart, won't you? I'm giving her a little afternoon dance. You know, Uncle Crawford, you and she must meet, sooner or later. . . . Why, you're sort of pale and . . . queer-looking. What's the matter?"

"Alonzo," said Mr. Crawford Lisenard, in a husky voice, "I—I must speak with you, and speak quite privately."

Alonzo's eyes swept the face that he knew so well and dearly loved. This monetary potentate, this prince of finance, his dead father's trusted brother, who had been to himself and his sister such a model of all devoted guardianship, *in trouble!* It seemed incredible.

"You're somehow not yourself!" he exclaimed, momentarily careless of the watching footmen. "Oh, Uncle Crawford, it isn't——?" And he drew back, with a laugh on his lips, but an anxious cloud in his gaze. "It isn't any nonsense of mine that you've been hearing of?"

"No, no, Lonz. Can't we be alone together soon? I'll come back later, or you'll come to me." And the gentleman, a little bewilderedly, turned toward the door, reaching forth a fluttered hand as if to grasp its knob.

Alonzo caught that hand between both his own. He had held it for an instant before, but not till then had he realized how cold it was.

"Light my studio at once," he said to a servant, recalling that the winter day had now completely darkened. The man sprang upstairs to obey his bidding, and Alonzo followed him at his uncle's side.

"The idea of your rushing off like that, Uncle Crawford! You come here so seldom that you're not to be released so easily when you do come." . . .

The long, melodious wailings of the waltz-music

floated up to them as they ascended the stairs. After several seconds Alonzo suddenly turned to his companion.

"Upon my word, Uncle Crawford," he recommenced, "if there were any bad news that you *could* bring me, I should imagine you had brought it now."

Mr. Lispenard paused. They were at the door of the studio. He put a hand on his nephew's shoulder and stared gloomily down into his face.

"I do bring you bad news, my boy. I—I bring you horrible news," he said.

Alonzo felt himself whiten. In a flash he divined what was meant. It could only be one thing. The ground swung beneath his feet as he passed with his uncle across the threshold of the studio, and closed its door behind them both.

## II.

**M**R. LISPENARD sank into one of the rich chairs. It chanced to be a Venetian piece of furniture, and his gaunt frame and elderly visage, both so clearly touched by modern meanings, made an odd contrast with the velvet and carvings of this archaic seat.

“You said — horrible news — Uncle Crawford?”

Alonzo dragged forth the words while his gaze wandered among the tumultuous beauties of the room, though it possibly did so without seeing one of them.

“Yes, my boy; the firm has gone. It’s been Chichester’s work. No one knew. I think some woman has been dragging him into the whole horror—a middle-aged man like that! He’s drawn enormous sums and gambled them away. It must have been going on for a good while. You see, I was careless about the books. I left all that to Chichester; my confidence in him was so perfect. I might, of course, have suspected. I knew that he lived high, belonged to fashionable clubs, entertained troops of friends. But there was so much money for his share that I never dreamed he could even spend his own income from year to year. And all the while he was plunging into your money, into your sister’s, into mine. There’s one Wall Street operation alone by which he must have lost two millions. And he’s been so infernally crafty, with it all! Even in dying he showed a cer-

tain devilish shrewdness, waiting till the very last enjoyable moment before he killed himself."

"Killed himself!" echoed Alonzo.

"Haven't you seen the evening papers?" replied his uncle. "Chichester was found in his bedroom, at two o'clock to-day, shot through the head, and evidently by his own hand."

There was now a silence, during which Alonzo stole up to his uncle's side and began to stroke that gentleman's grayish locks and pat one of his shoulders with affectionate fervor. "Uncle Crawford," he said, "you mustn't let this awful thing affect you too much. . . . Now that I look at you closer, I see just how jaded and upset you are. I'm so sorry for you — indeed, indeed I am!"

Crawford Lisenard's eyes filled with tears. He was called by the world a rather frigid old celibate, and he was known to live a lonely and loveless life. Perhaps in thirty years he had never really wept until now.

"You're sorry for *me*, Lonz?" he murmured. "And you don't think of yourself? . . . you don't think" —

"Oh, yes, I do," the nephew broke in. He went and touched a bell, coming back to his uncle's side, with a faint, fluttered laugh leaving his lips. "That is, I'm beginning to think of myself. But it's all so strange, so dazing, don't you know?"

When his bell-touch was answered he said a few words to the servant, who presently brought a goblet of champagne, which he insisted on having his uncle



sip. Then, when Mr. Lispenard had evidently felt the aiding effects of the stimulant, Alonzo went downstairs with him to his carriage. "I must turn up among my guests," he explained, "or they'll think this one of my rankest capers — and I'm always cutting up capers ; at least everybody tells me so. There . . . go home, and I'll join you between now and ten o'clock, surely. Don't worry too much. Things may not be so frightfully bad for us, after all." And he insisted on going with his uncle down the stoop bare-headed into the biting air, and closing the carriage-door with his own hands.

Then he returned to his guests, who were wondering at his absence. He heard a voice whispering in his ears above the gay strains of the music. "You've lost everything," said the voice ; "you and Kitty are paupers !" But when people asked him whither he had gone, he made light answers, and in the very teeth of a generally announced departure he bade the musicians strike up a polka and danced at his merriest pace with two or three different partners.

The farewells now followed, and except for Kathleen, her mother, his sister, Mrs. Van Santvoord, and five or six other loiterers, the rooms were soon deserted.

"You're to dine with us this evening," Kathleen said to him.

"No — I can't."

"You can't ! Why ? . . . Has anything happened ?"

"Yes." And he quickly told her of the suicide of

his uncle's partner. "It will cause great trouble, you understand—pecuniary trouble. I am afraid that there is disgrace behind the suicide. It looks as if Chichester had robbed the firm of large amounts." He hated to tell her that his wealth had vanished into air, though he felt securely certain that she would brim with compassion and devotion the moment that she learned the full truth. Had they not had many sweet confidential talks together before this engagement and since? And during such talks had he not seen straight into her frank, disinterested young soul? Long ago, however, he had realized that her mother was the essence of cold-blooded, mundane ambition, and that she had sanctioned her daughter's betrothal from motives that were, in the main, sordid ones.

"Don't mention money-losses to your mother, my dearest," he said. "I would rather speak to her on that point myself." Then, with a meaning pressure of her hand, he added: "If I don't see you again this evening I shall be wretched. But I must talk with Kitty, and after that my poor uncle, who is half-crazed by the suddenness of this blow, will need me at his house. Still, I will try to get to you, but if I fail, forgive me and pity me!"

Very soon afterward Kathleen left with her mother. It chanced that Alonzo noted the parting look which Mrs. Kennaird swept about those luxurious rooms. It seemed to say, that look of hers, "My child will soon be installed here, mistress of all this grace and grandeur."

And Alonzo, with a secret catching of the breath, bethought himself of the dizzy downfall which this woman's ambition must soon sustain. He pitied her; it was his nature to do that; and yet already he could feel his spirit stirred against her by forces of antagonism and revolt. What trouble might she not make, in imperiously disappointed way, for the daughter whose bright nuptial future would have grown null? But, thank heaven, Kathleen's love was proof against all suasion of this merely sordid kind. Against that stanch fortress the maternal guns might thunder futile broadsides.

Just as Mrs. Van Santvoord was gliding from the room, her brother and she met face to face. He had been downstairs, putting the Kennairds into their rather shabby hired carriage. His eyes were sparkling a little unwontedly, and he had not the least hint of color.

"Oh, Kitty," he said, "I forgot to tell you something. I wish you'd stay here about ten minutes or so longer; won't you?"

"Stay?" whined Mrs. Santvoord; and she looked toward the gentleman at her side. He was her latest caprice, and she rarely appeared anywhere without him. He had an amber mustache and babyish blue eyes. "I've promised Mr. Pettigrew," she began, "that" —

"You'd walk home with him?" finished Alonzo. "Jack will excuse you this once, I'm sure." And he laid a hand on the shoulder of Mr. Pettigrew, who in-

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stantly produced a smile that was a union of flawless teeth and two highly-developed dimples.

But when her Jack had gone and she was left alone in the vacated drawing-rooms with her brother, Mrs. Van Santvoord gave a long, bored sigh.

"I told them not to bring the carriage, Lonz," she fumed, dropping into a chair. "Hector said he might turn up, but he hasn't, and you know he never does any earthly thing that he promises he'll do. So now you'll have to send me home in your carriage, for it's freezingly cold outside, let alone being dark as pitch. And I ought to have got home an age ago. I refused the Bartholomews' dinner because it's a Patriarchs' ball night. Oh, I know you're not going because for some reason the Kennairds haven't been asked. But that's nothing to *me*, Lonz, you know, and I've promised to dance the cotillon with that dear, lovely Mark Manhattan."

"M—yes," replied Alonzo, musingly. "Is he the expected successor of Jack Pettigrew?"

"Lonz! how *can* you?" reproached his sister. "The word 'successor' is perfectly insulting. I don't know what you *mean* by it!"

She was very pretty as she sat there before her brother, with her trim, neat figure, her clear-cut, supercilious little blond face, her Parisian gown and its harmonious adjunct of a jaunty bonnet. The late dance had given her cheeks a becoming pink tint; her foes were apt to say of her that she was too pale, and perhaps a few of them said it because they wanted to tempt her into rousing, which would have been a

salient peg on which to hang their slurs. The "Hector" to whom she had just referred was her husband, whom she had married when she was only eighteen, eloping with him for that purpose, and whom it was whispered that she now gave a handsome yearly allowance in the double capacity of letting her alone and not appearing to let her alone too much. "Hector has every conceivable vice," she had said, not long ago, to her brother, "except that of incivility. He is so refreshingly polite to me. I dare say I might have tried to get a divorce from him three or four years ago, if it hadn't been for his beautiful manners."

Were the truth told about Kate Van Santvoord, it would have cast sad reflections upon her husband. She was one of those women who hunger, in their girlhood, for protective fondness, and to whom an early marriage is hence an agency teeming either with portentous misery or joy. Treated with decent marital respect, she might have made an excellent wife; treated quite the reverse of that, she had turned wifehood into a travesty. The aliment of frivolity on which she fed had augmented her natural feebleness of character. She was like a child foraging in a box of sugar-plums, which can be taken from it only with tragic shrieks and tears.

Alonzo dreaded something of this sort now. And yet the box of sugar-plums had to be taken away. There was no help for it.

"I always want to mean pleasant things when I talk with you, Kitty," her brother now replied. "I only wish that I could always mean to say them."

"You don't always try," she pouted, not at all comprehending him. "Just look how *other* women behave. I'd have you understand that I consider myself the—the pink of discretion!"

"You should liken yourself to a lily, my dear, and not a pink. Like the lilies of the field, you toil not, neither do you spin. But I'm afraid, Kitty, your . . . your vacation is over."

"My vacation over?" she queried, lifting her brows, staring at him, and, for the first time, perceiving that his face was colorless, and that there were drawn lines near his lips. But still no real suspicion of the truth came to her. "Oh, dear!" she exclaimed, "you're going to lecture me! you've heard something horrid about me, and you've believed it."

Alonzo smiled sadly, and for a moment lowered his look. "I've heard something horrid about both of us," he said, "and I'm compelled to let you know what it is." Then, amid silence, he lifted his eyes, and soon added: "It concerns our money. There's been a great loss." . . .

"A great loss?" was her cry, as she started up. "When? Where? How? Do you mean that any of *my* money has gone?"

"Yes." And as she again reseated herself, agitated and frowning, he pursued: "Kitty, what will you do when you've heard the entire truth, since you deport yourself like this on the mere threshold of it?" He at once proceeded to tell her the entire truth, and some time before he had ended she was almost in straits for breath.

"Oh, Lonz!" she at length gasped. "I—I can't think of myself as *poor*! It's too ghastly! Don't you believe there'll be anything left?"

"There's always something left, in these hideous affairs," Alonzo answered. "It's like a shipwreck; some kind of rubbish or another is sure to get washed ashore. I'm sorry for you, Kitty—awfully so. But the thing has got to be borne."

"Borne!" she almost shouted. "I—I *can't* bear it, and I won't! Poor! Ugh! I—I *loathe* poverty!"

"Most people do."

"Oh, that vile Chichester! I always *did* detest him! He was commonness itself, with his twang, and his diamonds, and his negro coachman."

"I quite agree with you."

"He should never have been allowed in the firm," raved the sister of Alonzo. And then her flippancy broke through her despair, in ludicrous contrast to it. "He didn't only have a negro coachman, but once I met him at Saratoga in the morning with a white evening necktie."

"And he has ended criminally, as might have been expected."

"Oh, you *joke* about it!" moaned Mrs. Van Santvoord, bursting into tempestuous tears. "You'd—you'd joke at the cannon's mouth!"

"That would depend upon what the cannon's mouth happened to be saying. . . . But, Kitty, look here: philosophy in these cases can't but prove the wisest course" —

"Philosophy! Pooh!" She had jumped up from

her chair and begun an excited promenade, pausing and turning every few seconds with a swish of her silken skirts. "Philosophy can't pay one's tradespeople for one. To be poor is to be low and contemptible. Oh, you needn't talk. I know life; I know the pettiness and nastiness of an empty purse. See here, Lonz!" And she suddenly shot up to his side and seized a lapel of his coat with trembling hand. "I shall go mad; I know I shall. I don't mean that it will break my heart; no doubt, Hector did that long ago, and I've been living on with the two pieces bumping one against another in my breast, and perhaps making me the restless, feverish creature I am. But if it doesn't break my heart it will break my brain." She snatched her hand away from him as he tried to take it, and then stooped her head while pressing a palm against either temple. At the same moment she gave vent to a shrill, hysteric laugh. Alonzo caught her in his arms and almost carried her to a lounge. . . . It was not till a good hour later that he accompanied her home in his own carriage. . . .

Her exhibition of terrified weakness had not, after all, struck him as strange. It was just what might have been expected of many a woman to whom the mere materialism of life had grown its dearest aim, its hardest fundament. Heroism, nerve, resignation, acceptance of unforeseen ill, was not to be anticipated from such as she. And there were so many, he reflected, exactly like her. The very spinal cord of their feminine dignity and self-reliance was pride in the plethora of their pocket-books. "Thank God,"



he thought, while his sister's faint sobs broke above the rumbling wheels of the chill, dark carriage, "my Kathleen is made of sterner and better stuff!"

The Van Santvoords had lately gone into a spacious house on Fifth Avenue, within almost a stone-throw of the Park. Kitty had grand ideas of the way one should live now, when one's income permitted—and hers had certainly challenged extravagance. But it was extravagance tempered by charming taste. She never entered her own carriage without having three men to attend her thither. The appointments of her home were splendor itself, and yet free from the least vulgar taint. No one in town gave grander and yet choicer dinners, and her "house-warming," a few weeks ago, was pronounced marvelous for its blending of elegance and discretion.

Quite soon after he had entered her handsome home with his sister, Alonzo met his brother-in-law and shook hands with him as he had done hundreds of times before. But on no occasion, however, had the incident of either meeting or shaking hands with Hector proved at all agreeable. Alonzo's heart had no gloomy lairs in which hates could lurk comfortably, but it is doubtful if he ever came nearer to detesting any fellow-mortal than he did in the case of Kitty's husband. Hector was to him a cold, hard, bright animal, openly voluptuous and secretly cruel. It was easy to see how any sentimental young girl might have fallen madly in love with his heroic figure and his chiseled face and his large eyes of diamond darkness. But to Alonzo the man was so brutally

Philistine that he offered a constant personal explanation of his rankest follies. He had murdered all that was finest in his wife, and those who knew him best were well aware how strong a thrill of triumph had passed through him when Kitty's own imprudences had swelled into a striking offset against those which he himself had committed. "I can hit back, now, if she tries the divorce game," he had once brazenly said in an assemblage of intimates. The ribaldry reached Alonzo's ears, and did not tend to deepen his regard for its author.

On his own side Hector greatly disliked Alonzo. He considered him a person besotted with namby-pambyism, and fit only to loll at the feet of women sillier than himself. He thought that his pranks and capers were the most pointless bits of buffoonery, and that he was never so much in his element as when the recipient of reluctant giggles from disgusted observers. More than once, during wrangles with his wife, he had aired opinions of this cutting sort as to her brother; and Kitty, "for the sake of peace," as women often put it to themselves, refrained from breathing a word of these savageries to Alonzo. Meanwhile, as at present, the two kinsmen continued to interchange civil greetings when accident placed them in one another's path.

"Dinner's been waiting ages," Hector Van Santvoord now said, following his wife and Alonzo into a small reception-room off the main hall, a nook that was all one tender bloom of rose-color and silver. Hector himself was in full evening dress; the white

at his throat became him, as it does most dark men with features clean-cut.

His wife rested an arm on the mantel and stood there gazing downward, in mournful apathy. Alonzo began to draw off his gloves, and said, while doing so: "I think that . . . Kitty had perhaps . . . er . . . supposed you . . . er . . . would dine out this evening."

He retained no idea of what words had escaped him a moment after he had thus spoken. It seemed necessary to break the awkward silence, and he had employed, with this purpose, a mechanical monotone.

Hector looked at his wife and shrugged his shapely shoulders. "I told you, Kitty," he grumbled, "that I would dine at home. . . . I might have sat down alone," he went on, still more ill-naturedly, after pausing for an answer, and receiving none; "but it occurred to me that you'd possibly bring some one home with you—not Alonzo, but Jack Pettigrew, or some one like that."

The sneer was evident, and as she perceived it Kitty raised her eyes. While she did so, her husband's look swept her face, and he plainly started.

"You've been crying," he said. "You're crying still. What's happened?"

Kitty, as if for answer, threw herself on a sofa and buried her face. Alonzo went to the open door and quietly closed it.

"A good deal has happened," he said to his brother-in-law. And then, with his discourse broken by his sister's audible tears, he spoke for some time.

The end of what he said left Hector extremely pale.

"Good God!" at length fell from him. "It's the most damnable thing! It's like—like a nightmare! I—I dare say I saw the suicide in the evening paper, but I always avoid reading those nasty things unless they're about people I know. And that fellow Chichester—why, I'd forgotten he was in the firm at all."

"His name's been conspicuous there for a number of years," returned Alonzo, with grinness.

"He was never fit to be Uncle Crawford's partner," exclaimed Kitty, lifting her head and clutching a tear-stained handkerchief in both hands. "He wasn't a gentleman, as I—I've often said. And now he's ruined us. For, even supposing we could save five or six thousand a year apiece, what would such a pitiful little sum be to *me*? What would ten thousand be—or even twenty? Oh, I wonder my hair isn't white already! Perhaps it may even come to living *in the country*! And I don't doubt all my diamonds will have to go! And—and my gowns will be sold round to anybody who'll take them, as Grace Hackensack's were when *her* husband went to smash!"

"You'd better wait till you know how things really are," muttered Hector, with lowered head and with hands in his pockets. "I dare say they'll turn out beastly enough." He glanced, here, at Alonzo, and with no gentle gaze. "Money neglected is apt to be money lost."

"Uncle Crawford never neglected his affairs," said Alonzo.

"Perhaps he didn't. But he's been getting on in

years. You were a partner in the concern, as well as he. But you only turned up there once a fortnight, and sometimes not even that."

"I never found myself wanted when I did turn up," said Alonzo, with indifference rather than good temper.

"That was because you took no interest in the concerns of the firm."

At this the brother-in-law of Hector slightly frowned. But he said, without the least harshness: "I could never master matters of business, and I think I was wise enough to realize that modesty alone makes us tolerate incompetence."

"Oh, pooh!" retorted Hector. "Idleness and laziness are not incompetence."

A flash left Alonzo's eyes then. "No," he replied. "If they were, you'd be an imbecile."

"Oh, come, now," scowled Hector. "I don't spend my time as *you* spend it!"

"True," Alonzo shot back. "You spend it in gambling; I don't. In drinking; I rarely drink. In the society of women whom you morally despise; to me that sort of woman is apt to be a dreary bore. . . . Ah, no, Hector; you're entirely right; we do *not* spend our time, you and I, in at all a similar way."

Hector was now pale with rage. It had never occurred to him till a few minutes ago that his brother-in-law's avoidance of the banking-house would bear disastrous fruit. But the horrible shock of recent tidings had made him anxious to pour blame on some

one, and his old dislike of Alonzo supplied, as it were, the needed victim.

"Well," he grumbled, tossing his head defiantly. "I don't strike attitudes in front of pictures and statues, and have fresh flowers brought to my bed before I get up of a morning, and change my clothes five times a day, and pretend I'm a great artist when I've hardly got a speck of real talent. At least I behave like a *man*!"

"Oh, no, Hector Van Santvoord," rang Alonzo's retort. "Pray *don't* flatter yourself that you've ever behaved like a man. A man, I mean, of either brains or principle!"

"Lonz! Hector! You mustn't quarrel," cried Kitty, springing from the sofa.

"I don't quarrel with blackguards," returned Alonzo; "I avoid them. But when one of them happens to be my brother-in-law and is insolent, plain speech can't be shirked."

"Oh, Lonz; now, *Lonz*!" she pleaded.

"You, Kitty," he went on, "have good reason to know what a blackguard that man really is. He stole you from your home when you were too young to understand the misery that such a match might bring on you. And afterward, having married you merely for your money, like the heartless trickster that he was, he soon turned marriage into the most horrid mockery. And such a man talks to me of idleness and laziness! The money my father left you has for years been his reason for steeping himself in both! It's an ill wind, as they say—and if this catastrophe brings him the

justice he deserves, it won't have been quite so bad a one after all." . . .

Alonzo spoke with what for Hector was a new fire, a new force. He might have said thrice as much and yet kept within the bounds of veracious invective. Perhaps a qualm of conscience caused Hector to stand staringly silent; perhaps, like most men of a bullying turn, he was no match for nerve and pluck when they spring from unforeseen sources. Thus far he had known only the soft and indolent side of Alonzo, laughing with irony either patent or furtive when people declared the young man solid below all his lightness, or intellectual notwithstanding his frivolities. Abruptly Hector found himself confronted with a being of whom certain rumors had reached him, but whose actual existence he had till now discredited.

Alonzo returned his stare for several seconds, and then stooped down and kissed Kitty on the forehead; for by this time his sister was clinging to him in blended sympathy and fear.

"Excuse me," he said, in a voice greatly moderated. "I should not have spoken as I did—that is, not before you. . . . I'll see you or write you soon. Trust me, and good-by." Once out in the keen cold of the lamp-lit avenue, he asked himself if he had not really been right in rebuking, with whatever heat, the impertinence of a man who of all others might with best taste have bridled his tongue. The mental answer to this question was a vehement "yes." He had dismissed his carriage at the Van Santvoords' door, expecting to dine with his sister. "Well," he

meditated, "one dines, if one can, in spite of all conceivable troubles — except it be a calamity to one's peptics." Gramercy Park was a good distance away; he did not feel like appearing at any of his clubs, and so he presently decided on the quiet restaurant of a modest up-town hotel. Here his appetite certainly proved slender, so busied were brain and heart with these late volcanic tidings, and with the lurid threat of to-morrow's fresh developments. But all the while he kept silently whispering to his unpalatable soup, his unengaging cutlet, that a heaven of tenderness, of compassion, of sacred fellowship, waited him from Kathleen when she should have learned just how greatly he stood in need of them all.

"But her mother — her mother," a voice within him seemed to urge. . . .

"Oh," he made mental answer to the voice, "why should *not* so radiant a rose have a big, sharp thorn? Let us allow that the mother is to be monstrously troublesome. That will only deepen the blessing of Kathleen's constancy."



### III.

“MY dear,” said Mrs. Kennaird, to her daughter, as they were being driven up-town together after quitting Gramercy Park, “I do hope Alonzo will not be late at dinner again to-day. People with great establishments need not mind delays of this kind, but we, in our detestable little Fifty-third Street flat, are quite destroyed by them.”

“Alonzo isn’t going to dine with us to-day, mamma,” said Kathleen.

“No? And pray why not?”

Kathleen gave the reason, and her mother greeted it with a little scream. “Mercy! Suicide? And a partner in the banking-house! I wonder what *could* have been the cause? He didn’t tell you? No? Perhaps it hasn’t transpired yet. It couldn’t have been money—oh, surely not! Their firm is almost like the Bank of England itself. As you know, dear, I made lots of inquiries when your engagement became probable. But one does so dislike to hear these wretched things. I declare, this has quite shaken me up. Chichester. . . . M—yes; he was not a person at all in society; no one ever heard of him at places. Possibly he was out of his mind when he did it. I think that I recall having heard he was in a fast set—not of people whom one meets, however; decidedly the reverse. If I am not mistaken, he was

connected in some vague way with the Lispenards; and the Lispenards (as I think I have told you once or twice before, my dear) were never of the least social importance till the father of Alonzo and Mrs. Van Santvoord married their mother. She, you know, was a Van Alstyne. Not that the Van Alstynes were by any means *real* Knickerbockers. I remember how poor, dear mamma used to say that some of the best houses in Bleeker and Bond Streets were shut to them. But they got to know the Mannhattans, though for some reason the Amsterdams didn't respond. They were on good terms with the Poughkeepsies, though the Schenectadys held aloof. But when Sybilla Van Alstyne married Gardiner Lispenard, things began to change. Sybilla was ambitious, and threw round the Lispenard name a halo it had never shone with before. A truly delightful woman. I often see something of her in Alonzo. Too bad that she should have died in her forties! She had just begun to entertain with an air at her house in Lafayette Place, and all the best people were at her feet. Such pretty feet, too—and they never led her into any quicksands like those that her daughter's have dared to explore. You can't see a trace of her mother in Kitty. But Alonzo is like both parents. He hasn't his father's fine presence, though. We speak of birth making the gentleman, and I, for one, firmly believe in birth—why should I not? But Gardiner Lispenard, with not enough ancestry to make out under a microscope, was nevertheless a gentleman to his finger-tips. It keenly surprised me that his wife's

death should have killed him, as they say it did. He always seemed to be a person too high-bred for anything so sensational as dying of grief. And yet he went within two years of poor Sybilla, leaving both children to the guardianship of their uncle, Crawford. Society expected that Alonzo Van Alstyne, their maternal uncle, would be intrusted with the care of them, for Alonzo had a . . . er . . . more patrician kind of right to their custody, as one might express it, don't you know? He had got to be a good deal received, and he had drifted into one or two exclusive clubs, and his money would have made him a match, if he had only chosen to marry discreetly; while Crawford Lispenard, on the other hand, went nowhere, and had wholly neglected the chances of acquiring position. But, as it turned out, the early death of poor Alonzo (who left considerable money to his niece and his namesake nephew) rendered that existing plan the luckier one. And society remembered the children when they grew up. Even Kitty's mad elopement didn't alienate us. We couldn't forget, you know, that their papa and mamma had really once been *des nôtres*, notwithstanding that hermit of an uncle. . . . But I'm afraid I've mentioned all this before, my dear. It's a twice-told tale, is it not?"

"Yes," fell from Kathleen, as she sat in the dimness of the rolling vehicle, opposite her mother. She did not say anything more, and perhaps a note of abstraction or weariness in her tone caused Mrs. Kennaird to proceed, with some crispness:

"Remind me, my dear, when I fall into a train of

stale reminiscences. That is a sign of advancing years, and I wish to avoid all elderly follies, as I hope I have steered clear of all youthful ones. It is my wish not merely to grow old with grace, but with a certain interesting freshness—*de mine bon enfant*, you know. So many women, as they age, get careless about pulling themselves together. They sink into ruts, and stay there. I want to avoid that sort of thing. Society rewards one if one will only make an effort. Wrinkles and gray hairs are forgiven, I have observed, but never the tendency to be dull and tautological. You're passed over the instant you begin to be prolix—to construct your syntax with an excess of perfects and pluperfects. Now, I don't want to be passed over, and I intend to preserve a healthy cult for the present tense of things."

Kathleen smiled to herself in the gloom. She could not help wondering, just then, if her mother had ever spent a single wakeful hour in her whole life without serious reflections on the subjects of "society," "position," and "the people whom one meets."

No hardship or bereavement had ever served, indeed, to lessen in this lady's esteem the magnitude of these momentous questions. And, when all was told, she had been a woman whom neither hardship nor bereavement had spared. Her family (how often had Kathleen heard so!) was of genuine New Amsterdam stock, and as Margaretta Van Lerijs, an only child, she had been reared in that ease which only wealth makes possible. But while she was yet a young

woman her father met with financial ruin, soon afterward dying. Margaretta had been a haughty belle, somewhat heavier in type than Kathleen, and not half so beautiful, but with the same graceful bearing and the same sculpturesque arms and neck. She held her head higher than did ever her daughter, and moved about with a statelier air. She was always thinking of a great marriage (even as a little girl she had dressed up her dolls in bridal robes for their weddings to imaginary princes or dukes); and when the family fortune had gone and she was obliged to live with her mother in a Ninth Street boarding-house, her matrimonial ambitions burned still more feverishly.

The Van Leries kindred (uncles and aunts and cousins) would call upon her in these new and hated surroundings, and go away shocked by her worldliness and pride.

"Isn't it dreadful?" her mother would wail to them, whenever Margaretta was out of hearing. "Adversity hasn't humbled her a bit. She's just as grand in her ideas as ever she was."

Now had begun for Margaretta those drastic ordeals of economy from which nearly all her future life was to suffer. She persisted in "going out," for to stay in was torture. Her gowns often made a woful showing, but she always wore them with a feminine sovereignty of mien that was quite her own. Poverty had by no means crushed her; she aspired in a way still to lead her world, and the stress of her extreme energy and self-belief saved her from failure. Caste was then more thought of in New York than now.

To be a Van Leries meant more than it now signifies, even though an empty purse went with the name. Plutocracy had not yet begun in such strong earnest its glittering usurpatures, though its rule was already potent. Margaretta was too intense an aristocrat to be called a mere snob. This word did and yet did not fit her, and perhaps for the very reason that she was a snob on too imperial a scale. If she had been luckier in life, she would have shone as a great social leader, though her *salon* would have won renown through the rank, not the brilliancy of its guests. As it was, she had a weary and even toilsome career to exploit. Social leadership was a prize that she could never clutch, eagerly stretched toward it as were the viewless hands of her desire and will. The environment of that Ninth Street boarding-house became a horror to her, and she literally insulted her fellow-lodgers by the repulsion of her demeanor. And yet, strange to say, it was here that she met Maitland Kennaird, the man whom she married. He was handsome, and of marked personal charm. An Englishman and a stranger, he threw himself on her mercy, and told her a tale which was, in the main, perfectly true. He was the only brother of Sir Frankland Kennaird, a rich English baronet. But the fraternal temper was terrible, and they had lately quarreled. He, Maitland Montagu Kennaird, had come to this country with a small legacy inherited from his mother, and in the hope of temporarily gaining livelihood as a clerk in the firm of a large wholesale druggist. That word "temporarily" suggested

an explanation which was soon afterward given. The elder brother, Sir Frankland, an irascible invalid, hopelessly deformed from his birth, had been doomed by several of the best European physicians to an early death. It was not possible that he could live five years longer, and his marriage was wholly out of the question. The title and estates would descend, on his death, to Maitland. These tidings were of the keenest interest to Margaretta. She took means of having them verified, and after she had made herself in a manner certain of their truth, she secured for her new acquaintance cards of invitation among the most exclusive New York circles. A few months later (on the death of her mother, who had always rather mistrusted and avoided him) Kennaird proposed to Margaretta, and was accepted. She liked him exceedingly, but would never have married him if it had not been for the fascinating prospect of soon becoming "Lady Kennaird." That dignity, however, she was doomed not to reach. Whether Maitland Kennaird had exaggerated or no the physical state of his brother, news of that gentleman's marriage floated across the Atlantic in a few more months. Meanwhile Maitland had been adjudged indolent and unbusinesslike by his New York employers. Receiving the offer of a mercantile engagement in London, he sailed thither with his wife. They had not much money between them, and a certain slice of Margaretta's modest fortune was "borrowed" from her to put into an investment which afterward turned out worse than profitless. But Margaretta had employed

politic arts toward a reconciliation between the Baronet and his brother, and succeeded in having herself and her husband civilly received at the family seat in Warwickshire. After all, though Sir Frankland had married a healthy and pretty girl of good lineage, there was still no prospect of an heir, and the chances of his life were still pronounced slender. Sir Frankland was not of a generous disposition, but he now helped his kindred in the maintenance of a small London home not far from Mayfair; and here, for several years, Margaretta nursed her passionate longings, while surrounding herself with all the people of distinction whom her tact, talent and good looks could captivate. At length her first child, a boy, was born, and she rejoiced keenly at his sex. Not long afterward, however, a distressing piece of intelligence was conveyed to her. Then she was smitten by a double blow: in the same week her own little son died, and Lady Kennaird became the mother of a boy.

Her husband, throughout this period, had proved himself not merely shiftless as a bread-winner, but prone to foolish excesses besides. The Baronet made no concealment of his triumphant gladness. Margaretta mixed her tears of motherly grief with those of disappointment and chagrin. A year later Kathleen was born to her, and when they told her that her child was a girl she fainted, and for a time her life was in danger. This event seemed like the last jeer of an evil destiny. But she bravely hid her despair, and no one save her husband knew its keenness. He had by this time sadly deteriorated, though her



indomitable will, and a sense of homage that she inspired in him, kept him from the grosser deeps of dissipation. Perhaps he might have sunk still lower than he did sink, however, had not death suddenly befallen him. He was killed in a too reckless 'cross-country ride while on a sojourn at the estate of his brother. A few years ago his taking-off would have been the most horrible of shocks to his wife. Now it only brought her a certain relief. She was free to marry again, and she meant to do so. Had not Lord Rothsay and the Earl of Auburndale both hinted to her their regrets that she was neither maid nor widow? But all this time Lady Kennaird had fostered a prejudice against her, and now, when she should have been more an object of pitying kindness to the Baronet than ever before, she was horrified by his curtailment of her yearly allowance.

Till her daughter was ten years old she continued to live in London. Those were ten pathetic years of struggle, whose real chronicle will never be written. Lords Rothsay and Auburndale did not seek in marriage the hand over which, when unattainable, they had so gallantly bowed. Other offers were made, but none of them just pleased their recipient. She uttered no public complaints, however, and hobnobbed with duchesses as blandly as if her income were many generous thousands of pounds, and not a few pinching hundreds. Her position was distinctive, but not enviable. At first she acquired the title of "the pushing American," but after a while her popularity and the thorough suitableness of her presence crushed

this impudent nickname. People with a positive appetite for select associations rarely fail in securing them, except it be that their natural equipments are at fault. Hers were so far free from such drawback that they obtained for her warm welcomes everywhere. And yet she secretly shivered with disgust at the bonds of her poverty, and the lessening lures of her person. One day she resolved to return to New York, and see for herself if life there might not be lived with smaller domestic strain and fret. She remained in her native town until Kathleen was nearly old enough to be "brought out." In New York, as in London, she held herself with the highest, missing no entertainment that was modish, and openly referring to her straitened affairs as if they had been those of an exiled queen. She was privately a good deal more laughed at here than in England, and with great inward bitterness she realized that the shattered Van Leries fortunes were an object either of forgetfulness or disrespect. Daily existence, too, was here much more difficult. A house of her own, however limited of space, was not to be dreamed of. She could only aspire to "apartments," and these, necessarily somewhat shabby, were in New York a brevet of inferiority. The plutocrats, moreover, were rushing to the front. Even her resolute aversion to being pushed against the wall suffered transient collapse. She might have given up the fight altogether but for the increasing beauty and fascination of Kathleen. She had by this time surrendered all hope of a lofty marriage; but why, she

now reflected, could she not revive these blighted yearnings in the future triumphs of her beautiful child? There, across the water, was her London status. They had not forgotten her yet: they were very good, over there, about not forgetting you when they had once accepted you. Why not *lancer* Kathleen at the next Drawing-Room? The commonest Americans were thrusting themselves nowadays into Buckingham Palace. Surely the niece of Sir Frankland Kennaird (who had now not only concluded to remain alive, by the way, but had become the father of two more lusty little boys) would present a decisive claim of entrance. After that, the sorcery of Kathleen's beauty and those qualities of intellect which a careful education had fostered would doubtless reap due results. Thus meditating, Mrs. Kennaird packed her trunks and once again sailed for foreign shores.

Kathleen's success in London was prompt and complete. Her connection with a Warwickshire baronet did not specially serve her. Old acquaintances flocked about her mother, and these, with their helpful influence, crowned the maternal desires. But though she soon became a celebrity and had scores of admirers, Kathleen was still looked on as a girl who would be a dowerless bride. This is nearly always fatal to the making of a great marriage in England, and Mrs. Kennaird knew it. Two years passed, and although the girl had no lack of devoted male attendants, that dreamed-of suitor with the shining name and princely rent-roll had not yet knelt at her feet.

Mrs. Kennaird grew restless, even petulant. "You repel your best opportunities," she said to her child. "*Look* the statue, if you please ; men like it. But in certain cases don't forget that your marble is feminine flesh."

Kathleen colored a little at this. She detested her mother's worldly spirit ; she had ideas of her own as regarded life and how best to live it ; she had thought with depth and breadth for one of her age and sex ; she had read some of the wisest modern books, many of which are wiser, by the way, when truly deserving to be called so, than whole libraries of more antiquated views and teachings. And yet her mother's personal spell was one which constantly cast over her a kind of invisible net from whose filaments thorough escape seemed vain. She had a mind of both finer and stronger fiber than that of her mother, and a nature in all ways profounder. Yet still there were times when the mere sound of her mother's voice caused her covert tremors and thrills. It was like a mesmeric force, and it often took the form of a fear. Reasoning coolly about it, the girl would tell herself that she understood perfectly its cause. Her mother's personality was an intense one ; it had spiritually ensheathed her, so to speak, through all her younger years. Now, when she had broken loose from its ligatures, its fetters, the discovery came to her that habit could not so easily be disrupted. . . . And yet, there were times when even this explanation did not suffice for Kathleen, and when there seemed subtle and mystic reasons why it should not. But now and then she

would laugh nervously at her own fancies, and declare to her own heart that a very simple solution of the problem was to be found in filial love. For she did love her mother, and with great fondness and devotion, in spite of mental and even moral differences between them which often appeared abysmal.

"*You* forget, mamma," Kathleen now said, "that statues are purchasable; they're apt to have their price. If by 'opportunities' you mean those of getting myself sold" —

"Tut, tut, dear," broke in her mother. "Don't go out of your way to call marriage hard names. And depend upon it, you couldn't say an original thing on the subject if you brooded a year. It's an institution that has had as much abuse poured upon it as imprisonment for debt. Of the two evils, however, civilization has concluded only to abolish one."

Kathleen made an impatient gesture as that ending bit of satire was spoken. "I'd no idea of running down marriage," she said. "It's a very sweet and holy relation, I should judge, when two people enter into it with proper motives and feelings."

Mrs. Kennaird gave one of her trillingly musical laughs. It was a laugh that always sounded well in a drawing-room; it had been for years like the delicate little trumpet-peal of her regnant popularity.

"My *dear* Kathleen! If you could only hear yourself! You don't know what a really dewy effect you create, with your droll assumption of experience! But the wisdom-cap, my child, is decidedly becoming. Go on, my dear, and talk of marriage as 'a sweet and

holy relation.' The *ensemble* is immensely fresh in a willowy girl with just your cut of features."

"Ah," cried Kathleen, flushing and biting her lips, "I truly believe, mamma, that if you saw one man rescue another from drowning, your first idea of the affair would be whether the savior performed his feat with awkwardness or grace!" . . .

At about this time, as it happened, Mrs. Kennaird committed the crowning mistake of her life. Among the persons of note who had most cordially greeted her on her return was a stanch former friend, the Marchioness of Dendudlow. The Marchioness was a woman of large heart, though quick temper. She was famed for the sincerity and tenacity of her likes and dislikes, and Mrs. Kennaird had long stood high on the list of the former. Lady Dendudlow thought that Sir Frankland had treated her friend with a sorry stinginess, and very freely vented this opinion. She fell in love with Kathleen, and encouraged an intimacy between herself and her only daughter, Lady Guinevere Poindexter, one of the reigning London belles. Twice she invited the Kennairds to come and visit her at the most delightful of her several country-seats, Dendudlow Hall, near the Devon cliffs. It was during the second of these visits that Mrs. Kennaird's fatal blunder occurred.

Besides Lady Guinevere, the Marchioness had two other children, both sons. The eldest, Lord Armitage, had lately married, and was traveling on the continent. At Dendudlow Hall, when Kathleen and her mother made the second visit there, was the

younger son, Lord Egbert Poindexter. Neither of the ladies had ever seen him before, and for an excellent reason. Although in his latter twenties and of a marked personal beauty, he lived a most retired life on account of his lameness. An accident in childhood had partly deprived him of the use of both lower limbs, and he never moved himself except with the aid of crutches. His mother was almost fanatically fond of him, and guarded him as the apple of her eye. She confided to Mrs. Kennaird that he was immensely rich, and would, in this respect, far outshine his elder brother, even after he should become marquis, for an elderly aunt, pitying his juvenile misfortune, had left him a great property in Sussex, besides ample moneyed capital, to the rage and disappointment of a bevy of waiting heirs. "It is a great chance," proceeded the Marchioness, "for Egbert to show his fine humanitarian spirit. He will, I am certain, send his name ringing through the centuries as a noble and wise benefactor to his race. His marriage, you know, is impossible, and"—

"Why impossible, my dear Lady Dendudlow?" broke in Mrs. Kennaird.

The Marchioness's pure-cut, patrician face hardened a little. "Oh, I should not have said *impossible*, perhaps, but surely in no sense probable. At least, not for years yet. Egbert is still young. If he once reached an age of sufficient discretion to make him realize that the woman whom he asked to become his wife might give him fidelity, companionship, affection, without a gleam of the sentiment which younger

men expect and demand ; and if, so realizing, he married as much with head as with heart, why, then, I should put no obstacle in the way of such a union. But *now!*” And the Marchioness lifted one hand, waving it before her face. “Plenty of girls might *say* that they cared for him, you understand, but”—— Here, with a self-conscious little laugh, she paused. “However, my friend, let us talk of something else.” . . .

Mrs. Kennaird thought her prejudice a most perverse and ill-advised one, which no doubt it was, considering the gentle charm of Lord Egbert’s conversation and the marked comeliness of his visage.

More people came to Dendudlow Hall in a day or two, and the Marchioness, occupied with other guests, failed to see what swift and tender havoc Kathleen had wrought in the breast of her younger son. But Mrs. Kennaird saw, and tingled with new, delicious hopes. The Kennairds were, and yet were not, a portion of the present house-party ; their stay had graciously been taken for granted as an indefinite one. Lord Egbert fell in love with a kind of tumultuous expedition. He sat beside the object of his sudden passion as long, each day, as she would let him ; and, when not following her on his crutches, he did so, as far as possible, with his poetic blue eyes. The determination of his mother had thus far never given him a thought ; now he rebelled against the idea of not being permitted to marry when and whom he chose.

In a short time the Marquis, his father, was expected back to his favorite home in Devonshire,



after a term of shooting on the Scotch moors. A certain plan had entered the head of Lord Egbert, and he at once proceeded to carry it out. He had observed Mrs. Kennaird's power over her daughter; he had observed, too, this lady's marked admiration for himself. Though young, he was worldly-wise. It was plain to him that his parents would not sanction his engagement to Kathleen Kennaird, even if they allowed him to wed at all. She was not, from the Dendudlow point of view, his equal, and the whole proposition would have been met only with dainty disgust. So poor, lame Lord Egbert stubbornly made up his mind. One morning he hobbled to the side of Kathleen's mother and murmured a few words in the ear of that lady. She listened, and even in listening Margaretta Kennaird committed a species of folly. But she did more; she lent herself, before two hours had passed, to a scheme of elopement. Early the next morning Lord Egbert and Kathleen were to depart from the Hall together, only returning thither as man and wife. Kathleen, when she was apprized of her mother's fixed resolve, turned very pale and declared that unless it were abandoned she would acquaint Lady Dendudlow with the entire affair. The girl was terribly in earnest, and her auditor discerned it. But Mrs. Kennaird attempted no coercion. She literally sank at her daughter's feet and implored her to yield. Then, with a retrospective glibness that sometimes narrowly missed eloquence, she discoursed of her own past—the privation, the injustice, and the pathos of it! Kath-

leen hearkened, and the spell began to work. . . . Before her mother had done with her she gave her consent, but in a mood of conscience-stricken reluctance.

Of course two or three servants had to be trusted, and one of these was Lord Egbert's valet, a gentleman of conservative tenets and shrewd diplomacies. In the autumn dawn of the following morning, Kathleen and her mother descended from their apartments to find Lord Egbert waiting them. Outside a vehicle also waited, and the three were about to enter it when Lady Dendudlow appeared, accompanied by her husband, the Marquis, who had arrived on the previous evening.

It is no exaggeration to state that the enraged Marchioness now covered her offending guest with the most furious invective. Mrs. Kennaird and Kathleen were actually hustled from the Hall with as little ceremony as if they had been two suspicious tramps, and the wrathful revolt of Lord Egbert was treated very much as if it had been the clamor of a rebellious baby. The designed elopement did not end merely in detection, but in pitiless exposure as well. The Marchioness, having once got rid of two women whom she regarded as vipers warmed at her hearthstone, proceeded to bruit what she denounced as their wily treachery from one end of the kingdom to the other. She was an excellent hater, was this noble lady, as already has been chronicled. She did not spare the Kennairds, nor did her husband, whom she notoriously ruled. Their acrid statements en-

gendered a scandal from which sprang the most hurtful odium. Mrs. Kennaird's "matrimonial plot" was soon on numberless lips. The society journals had their fling at her, and she was referred to as the "inveigler" and again as the "American pusher." To rally round her a few genial adherents meant one thing; to fight the powerful acrimony of the Dendudlows meant quite another. She soon woke to the fact that her London position was ruined, and that her attempt to connect her child with the haughty house of Poindexter had wrought for her dreadful contumely. There is no doubt that she had been very cruelly treated, considering all the circumstances; but there is no doubt, too, that in a measure she had brought upon herself the punishment which had overtaken her with such rude and public lash-strokes.

In midwinter of the following year she returned to this country, settling in that "detestable little Fifty-third Street flat" to which we have already heard her allude. She mentioned to her New York friends the affair at Dendudlow Hall with mingled sorrow and indignation. She had always been a woman who could embellish and manipulate facts with prettiest adroitness, and her "version" of the whole ill-starred event was both self-exculpating and picturesque. It won her many sympathizers, too, and these clad Kathleen and herself with delicate mantles of martyrdom.

"I shall never return to that horrid country again," she would say, with her grandest yet most aggrieved manner. "My poor dear husband lost his life there,

in the first place, and now, in the second place, it has made me the object of a shocking slander ! ”

To certain more intimate friends she would occasionally murmur : “ I don’t want it to be *repeated*, but that Louisa Poindexter (the Marchioness, you know) is the very *most* jealous of women ! Dendudlow (the Marquis, you understand, though for years I always called him ‘ Charlie ’) had, *of course*, been sent off to Scotland on *my* account *solely*. His sudden arrival at the Hall was a *great shock* to Louisa, and . . . well, to cut an unpleasant story short, she *lost her head*. But mind, now, *don’t* repeat this ; I tell it in the strictest confidence.”

The confidence was frequently violated, however, and with due effect of prestige for her who had imparted it ; since some of the New Yorkers whose ears these neat innuendoes tickled, failed to resist a kind of reverence, not to say awe, for any compatriot ever friendly enough with an English marquis and his wife to call one “ Charlie ” and the other “ Louisa.”

Kathleen, for her part, would keep speechless regarding this whole subject. It was a silence that some persons failed leniently to construe. But the girl had said to herself that she would not lie ; and so silence, as she wisely held, was a discreeter course.

#### IV.

IT was during the winter following her return to New York that Kathleen became engaged to Alonzo Lispenard. The betrothal was still a relative novelty. Mrs. Kennaird had been delighted by it. She affirmed it far better than having a cripple for a husband, even though he might have made his wife Lady Egbert Poindexter. Now, at last, to this fatigued struggler would come the blessed release of repose. Not the repose of rest, however. Margaretta Kennaird was of the kind whose most peaceful hours are spent in the bustle of ball-rooms, and for whom there can be no more distracting mental turmoil than simply "staying at home."

The remark which we have heard regarding the richness of Kathleen's costume worn at her lover's little banquet in her honor contained an undeserved sneer. Mrs. Kennaird had gone rather deeply into debt since the engagement, but she had not borrowed a dollar of Alonzo. Her course, however, had worried Kathleen not a little, and it was with reference to that same sable-trimmed garment that the girl had said :

"Mamma, what *is* the use of such splendor? Everybody knows we can't afford it!"

"My dear," was the reply, "nobody *knows* very much about us, financially. I read in the 'society

column' of some paper, the other day, that my late husband had left me *only* seven thousand dollars a year. I couldn't help wishing he'd left me one. But I'd just as lief have it thought that I possessed ten. If you can't *be* comfortably well-off, the next best thing is to *appear* so."

"I don't agree with you. I think just the opposite," protested Kathleen. "Besides, mamma, there's but one way that these bills can be paid" —

"Certainly, there is but one way, dear. You will pay them after you're Mrs. Lisenard."

"But it isn't nice" —

"To mention the matter now? Very true; it isn't. But you brought it up, my child. I've always insisted that taste and silence are twin sisters, and that our salvation largely depends on the things we do not say." . . .

This evening, after they had reached home, Mrs. Kennaird's humor was notably bland. The event of the afternoon had put, as it were, a final filagree on the structure of her attainments. Her future spread deliciously halcyon. Still, during dinner and throughout the remainder of the evening, she had much to say concerning the Chichester suicide, and her words were blended with hints of worriment that came and fled along the current of her speech like lights and shades along a lapse of meadow.

"We might have gone to the Ogstons' after all," she said to Kathleen at dessert. "It's only a small affair, and the Patriarchs' ball may quite spoil it; but then, the Ogstons are so select. They have no *real*

right to their extremely lofty position, it's true, but" ——

"Don't you recollect, mamma?" Kathleen broke in. "We thought it best not to go everywhere nowadays, on account of rumpling good gowns for larger entertainments. Now, don't change your mind at the last moment; please don't. I've an interesting book, and I'd intended to pass a quiet evening with it."

"Then Alonzo isn't coming at all to-night?"

"I think he will not come," replied Kathleen, who at the same time hoped that he would come, yet did not presume to prophesy.

Alonzo, as it turned out, remained absent. Kathleen forgave him, knowing what an excuse he had for staying away. Yet she passed an evening of suspense that was ended by disappointment.

She slept ill, that night, and rose so late that when she appeared at breakfast her mother had completed the meal and met her with a half-crumpled morning paper in one hand, while the other employed itself in little agitated waves.

"There are dreadful things printed about the suicide of Mr. Chichester," Mrs. Kennaird announced. "Oh, perfectly dreadful things! It *can't* be true, though, that he has ruined the firm before blowing his brains out!"

"No, no," faltered Kathleen, as she seated herself at the breakfast-table. "Alonzo will be here this morning, I'm sure, and tell us the real facts." . . .

He came, but not till late that afternoon. He had been with his uncle until quite late on the previous

evening, and he had spent all the earlier part of his day at the bank.

"Ruin, ruin, or something almost as horrible," rang through his brain as he stood at Kathleen's doorstep. He was silently quoting the words of his uncle, uttered just before they parted.

Kathleen received him alone. "I'm so glad your mother isn't here," he began, as they sank beside one another on a sofa. "I've a great deal to tell you."

And he made clear what he had to tell. It was terrible tidings. The Lisenard wealth had been wildly squandered.

"I'm a poor man," Alonzo at length finished. As he thus spoke he caught Kathleen's hand, and instead of pressing it waited for her to do so. The clasp came, but more faintly than he had expected.

"Kathleen!" he exclaimed, and withdrew his hand entirely from hers.

"Lonz — Lonz!" she said, and looked at him with wistful eyes that a thread of tearful storm seemed darkening.

Just then Mrs. Kennaird entered. She had been listening, but by no means had caught all that Alonzo had spoken. His voice had been too low, in the first place, and in the second she had used an overplus of caution.

Alonzo gave her a somewhat flurried greeting, and slipped from the apartment within the next few minutes, promising Kathleen that he would come back that evening.



But it was five good days before he came back. During this time he wrote his sweetheart several eager and soulful letters, in more than one of which he offered to release her from all bonds of betrothal. Repeatedly Kathleen replied that she would not consent to be released. During these days the very worst became patent to Alonzo. A mere wreck was left to his sister and himself of their former splendid patrimony. The young man was surprised by his own calmness. He arranged in the most quiet way for a sale of all his possessions; he held more than one very painful interview with his sister at his own residence; he discharged his servants, and engaged a small suite of rooms, placing a bill upon his house in Gramercy Park. His many costly art-treasures he offered to an auctioneer on condition of their immediate sale. He amazed everybody who observed him by his coolness and serenity. And all the while his heart was strained by a wretched suspicion of Kathleen. Not that he thoroughly doubted her; but there had been a nameless dread born of that last meeting—a dread which her letters did not dissipate, for he seemed to read between their lines, and as he thus read, a voice vaguely cried to him: “It is not she! It is not the woman you so trusted! Something that you believed would leap from her and breathe itself to you, burning, living, unmistakable, has not shown itself.”

And yet he might be wronging her so sternly! What if his dear and faithful friend, Philip Lexington, would go to her and hold a little talk with her,

and tell him afterward whether he was a madly self-conscious fool or whether there had really been good cause for his doubts?

Alonzo felt his heart warm toward Philip Lexington as he thought these thoughts. "Dear Philip!" ran his musings. "He will come to me on the instant and seek to aid me all he can!"

Lexington obeyed the summons. He looked as handsome as ever, and listened with his usual gracious calm to all that Alonzo said.

When his turn came to reply, however, Lexington shifted his legs uneasily and posed a little sideways his dark, shapely head.

"I don't a bit want to sound Miss Kennaird on this question," he softly declared. "I'd ever so much rather be excused. Frankly, I would."

Alonzo stared at him, and then dropped his eyes. "Oh, you prefer not to serve me? All right."

"Why put it like that?" came the reply. "I'd serve you, if I could, in some *other* manner. . . . I"——

"Don't think of some other manner," Alonzo broke in, with his voice keen and cold. "This little favor tests your friendship."

"Oh," exclaimed Lexington, "you can't mean that."

"I do mean it," averred Alonzo. "You know just what trouble has come to me."

"Yes. It's too bad. It's really horrid, you know."

"I've lost my fortune, Philip. I'm a poor man."

"Yes. I'm awfully sorry for you."

"Thanks for your sympathy."

Lexington began to curl his full, dark mustache by slipping a thumb under one of its ending curves, and a forefinger precisely above the thumb. Then, while completing a little airy twist of the grasped hairs, he replied :

“Look here, my boy, you’re devilishly sensitive, I should say !”

“Right, Philip. I *am* sensitive. Haven’t I reason to be ? Now is the time that what friends I’ve had should stand by me. I never thought I had many real friends ; I hardly believed, for that matter, that I had any at all. But I *did* count on you. And this thing I’ve asked you to do is such a small thing”——

Philip Lexington rose, now, with a weary sneer on his fine-chiseled face.

“A small thing !” he broke forth, mockingly. “What, pray ? To go and ask a girl who engaged herself to you because you had lots of money, whether she will have you now that you’ve lost nearly everything. Can’t you *see* beforehand what her answer will be ? If you’ve fancied there was anything queer in her deportment the last time you met her, can’t you ”——

“Stop there,” said Alonzo. He had risen, too, and though he preserved much composure, an abrupt wave of his hand bespoke excitement. “I—I deny that Kathleen Kennaird ever engaged herself to me because, as you put it, I had lots of money.”

“Then you’re wrong,” said Lexington, gazing down at his well-varnished boots. “You’re ” (with another

twirl of the mustache-tip) "dead wrong, I assure you."

Alonzo gnawed his lips. "Phil," he cried, "what *are* you saying?"

"Only the truth."

"The truth?"

"Yes — yes."

"But you must be mad to state that Kathleen — Oh, no, no, no, Phil!"

Alonzo had caught his friend by either shoulder and was plunging a penetrant look into his eyes. The latter, with a coldness unexpected yet distinct, answered:

"It's so odd. You ought to know life. You're old enough."

"Philip! Philip!" broke from Alonzo. "I'm so sorry I asked you to go to her! But you're my friend still? It isn't my lost money that you're thinking of? No, no, Phil, not you — not you!"

"Don't be tiresome."

Lexington might have said volumes and yet not have hit on a more pungent little series of words than those three.

"I'll try not to be tiresome," came Alonzo's answer, as if between shut teeth. "It's quite clear to me, Philip, that my request bores you."

"Well," returned Philip, doggedly, after a slight silence, "it does."

"It wouldn't have done so a short while ago."

"I don't understand."

"Don't you? I do."

"You seem angry at me," muttered Philip, "and for no reason."

"For no reason!"

"None that I can see. A short while ago? You mean, then?" . . .

"Oh, I mean what I mean, Philip. There's hardly any favor that you'd have refused me a short while ago. Now you find me of no importance. I've lost my money, and I'm not worth cultivating."

Lexington flushed hotly, and tossed his head. "Isn't that rather uncivil of you?" he frowned.

"Yes, if you choose. But the incivility of raw truth has sometimes a certain refreshing refinement."

"I don't grasp your paradoxes. You always excelled in them, however."

Alonzo had grown very pale. "Let it all rest there, then, Philip," he said. "You've disappointed me horribly. Good-by." And he turned on his heel with a dismissal at once quiet and imperious.

Lexington walked to a door and seized its knob. "Oh, just as you please," he said, sullenly. "You keep up your pride, but I'm afraid it won't serve you as well as you think. With regard to the money I owe you, since we've both been mentioning money so — so broadly, I'll do my best"——

But here Alonzo shot out these ringing words :

"I don't want a dime from you, and I'll be only too glad if you'll consider that debt canceled, so to speak, by the cessation of our acquaintance."

Across another threshold Alonzo swiftly quitted the room. No sooner was he alone, however, than he

reproached himself for undue severity. And yet he did not regret having broken with this man. It was mercilessly patent to him that Lexington had been the most time-serving of friends. A kind of clairvoyance had told him this, by flashes at once intuitive and acute. Hundreds of other men, placed like himself, might have meant as much as he and said a great deal less. But Alonzo had rarely dealt in self-restraints. Those who liked him best liked him because of such candors; those who liked him least did so because his free speech, his wearing the heart on the sleeve, repelled them from the point of view of taste, if from none other. And these latter critics would have been just the ones to denounce his openness with Lexington as vulgar, however much they disapproved the conduct of Lexington himself. They were already supplied with many instances of his previous harum-scarum deportment. They would have told you that he lacked gentility to almost the verge of grossness, and that "his being such a good fellow at heart" was merely the shallow excuse made for him by a spirit of faultful indulgence.

But perhaps if they could have seen him seated in solitude long after Lexington had left him forever, and have marked the twitching of his lips, the moisture that glistened in his honest eyes, the occasional clenching of his hands or nervous tappings of his feet against the floor, they might have been touched by a form of human sorrow which ranks with the most piteous we are ever called upon to undergo. For Alonzo had meant generously, kindly, even nobly

toward his world, and was now being confronted with its hollowness and hardness. But yesterday people had smiled on him who to-day scarcely chose to veil their indifference. He had referred with cynical phrase to his own position as a favorite. But he had never really believed his own bitter allusions, for his nature was too replete with warm good-will toward his fellows. And now, this fine and wholesome loving-kindness in him was being taught the sternest of disillusioning lessons.

"I may have doubted many of them," he told himself, "but at least I firmly trusted Phil. . . . Well, well, what I asked him to do was perhaps better left undone. At least, I can do it more capably than he. I need no emissary. I'll go to her myself, and face the worst."

He went that same evening. He did not ask for Mrs. Kennaird, but that lady chose to receive him. He instantly saw that her demeanor was formal, and even a trifle austere.

"I am so sorry that poor Kathleen has a horrid headache this evening," she soon said, "and is lying down. Pray accept me, will you not, as her substitute?"

Alonzo was quietly desperate. He looked the speaker straight in the eyes as he answered, feeling that the air bristled with coming discord.

"My dear Mrs. Kennaird, you are the most charming of persons, if you will permit me to frame such a commonplace. But I must be frank, and inform you

that for Kathleen there can be, to my thinking, no possible substitute."

He watched her eyelids quiver a little, and her large form slightly stiffen. "But you will show mercy to my poor child's headache," she returned, with a smile that seemed just to edge her lips and no more. "You will be good enough, on that account, I am sure, to make the best of me under the circumstances."

Alonzo gave his head a short, negative shake. "I can't. I want Kathleen, headache and all."

"Oh, but you're presumptuous."

"That's just what you force me to become."

"Not at all."

"Then allow Kathleen to appear."

"She is too much indisposed — as I told you."

"I would like to learn that, if you please, from her own lips."

"Bless me," said Mrs. Kennaird, lifting her shoulders for a moment and putting up her glasses. "You're ruder than I thought you knew how to be."

"Say more decided. And I'm compelled to add this: If Kathleen is forbidden me I neither can nor shall accept you as her proxy."

"No?" replied his hostess, with hardening face. "But suppose my daughter desires just that arrangement."

"She does not desire it."

"You speak with a delightful confidence, really!"

"Oh, madam, let us end this!" cried Alonzo, feeling himself grow pale. "If you attempt to keep



Kathleen from seeing me your effort can only produce transient results."

Mrs. Kennaird threw back her head a little, as though on the verge of a scornful laugh. But either she checked herself, or something in the visitor's look checked her. Like a flash her whole visage changed. Not that it became softer, but that it surely lost in expression both subtlety and restraint.

"My dear young gentleman," she said, "I'm very sorry for you, because I've always liked you. But the truth may as well be told without another instant of delay. Your engagement to my child must cease, and you know why."

"So, then, it's open war," murmured Alonzo. "I prefer that."

"It isn't war at all. It's worldliness, if you choose—policy, sordidness, any bad name you're bent on calling it."

"I'll call it the same spirit, then, that made you try to entrap into a marriage with her that crippled young English lord."

He had hit, and with poignant thrust, the heart of a wound that had never healed. She frowned, and the color left her tightening lips. While she stared at him, he went on :

"Oh, Kathleen has told me ! But she never knew what love meant then, and that was why she was such wax in your hands. It's altered with her now ; your rule isn't what it once was. If it had been you'd have kept her from writing me those letters. I've offered to release her, but she has refused. The

terms of her refusal have seemed to carry with them a certain tang of yourself. Perhaps I've judged her wrongly." Now he rose, and went toward a door which led into the other apartments of this limited flat. He caught with one hand the curtain draped across this door, and drew it slightly aside. "It's not your opposition I fear ; it's the thought that she may be influenced by it. I know you've done all you could to dissuade her. But she must come to me scorning (yes, that's the word—scorning!) such odious arguments as you've doubtless addressed to her, or she shall not come at all." At this point he drew the little curtain still further aside, and knowing that his voice needed only to be raised a key or so above the ordinary to make it reach the farthest room of the suite, he called, with clear accents :

"Kathleen ! Kathleen ! I am here and wish to speak with you. Will you not come to me for at least a few moments ?"

An exasperated cry broke from Mrs. Kennaird, who had now gained her feet.

"You're insolent !" she cried. "You're outrageous ! I told you my daughter was ill. And now, sir, I command you to leave these apartments."

But Alonzo scarcely heard this voice, for another, faint, sob-broken, and somewhat distant, had fallen on his ears. He still held the curtain sideways when Mrs. Kennaird sprang toward him and tried to wrest it from his grasp.

"Do you call yourself a gentleman ?" she gasped, as he thwarted her attempt.

"Do you call yourself a mother?" he replied. . . . And then Kathleen glided quickly through the open doorway, pale and trembling, though quite tearless.

Alonzo at once receded. From that instant his mien and voice became judicial in their calm. It was he who broke silence, after the trio had thus met.

"Tell me," were his first words to Kathleen, "why, when I came here, did you permit your mother to meet me in your place?"

Kathleen, with compressed lips, remained speechless.

"Tell me," Alonzo repeated.

The girl shot a look at her mother. "This man has behaved like a ruffian!" now rang from Mrs. Kennaird. "Go back to your room, my dear, and show him that you will not see me insulted."

But Kathleen had now turned her gaze upon her lover.

"Mamma wished to meet you before I did," she said. "I had not expected you. Your coming unnerved me a little, and so . . . I . . ."

She dropped her eyes as that last sentence faltered feebly into silence.

Alonzo took two or three swift steps toward her and then paused.

"What purpose could be served," he questioned, "by your mother meeting me first?"

"None — none," she stammered.

"Are you not my promised wife? Is it not settled that we shall shortly marry? Have I not offered to break our betrothal, and have not you" —

"I've insisted that it should be kept." And she stretched out both hands to him.

He advanced and caught them in both his own. "I *will* believe you!" he cried. "I *will* believe that you've never once swerved from me! It's all that evil genius of yours — that deplorable mother!"

"Ah," said Mrs. Kennaird, in severe reproach to her daughter, "can you be willing, Kathleen, to let me suffer such indignity?"

"Your mother has just told me, Kathleen," hurried Alonzo, while he still clasped the girl's hands, "that our engagement must cease."

"Yes, those were my words, dear," panted Mrs. Kennaird. "I don't deny them. You've heard me say them to yourself quite often, of late."

"Too often, mamma," came the answer. "And I've always begged you not to try and move me. But you would keep on trying. And it has done no good!" She let her beautiful crystal eyes caress his face now, as she turned to Alonzo.

"You'll make this sacrifice, Kathleen?" hotly demanded her mother. "You'll marry a ruined man? You, with your ideas, your ambitions?"

"Yes, yes, mamma."

"I don't want you to look on it as a sacrifice," protested Alonzo, with lips leaned close to her cheek. "And *have* you such grand ideas, ambitions? If this be true, why, perhaps, then, as I wrote you, it's better to"——

"No, no," she interrupted him, and snatched her hands from his only that she might throw both arms

about his neck. And now, half-whispering in his ear, she said what served for him as an ugly counterstroke to the pang of happiness just dealt him.

"When I see you, Lonz, I'm so strong! All doubts of our future vanish. I can't help, you know, being *her* daughter. There are times—I've told you of them—when she seems to govern me against my will. And then she's my mother, and I love her. If I'm disappointed—if I'm fearful of just how I shall be able to bear it all—if moments come to me when, as your letters hinted, I feel that our life together may have lost something of—of the expected savor and ease and gracefulness my fancy clothed it with, be lenient, be forgiving! Will you not, for my sake?"

He withdrew himself from her, and at once said, with tones that bore no trace of concealment:

"To *me*, Kathleen, our life together would now be even happier than before. And if those moments *do* come to you at this early period, what may not occur when you're the wife of a poor man, a man who means to work instead of idling, and can give you simply his homespun devotion instead of that other luxurious existence you foresaw and counted on?"

"Everything horrid and forlorn may happen in the case you've pointed out!" exclaimed Mrs. Kennaird. "If Kathleen marries you, she will make you the worst of wives."

Alonzo had for a brief while forgotten the very presence of this lady, who had just declared it with such emphasis.

"Oh, it's you again!" he said, and his countenance

grew one cloud of disgust. "For God's sake, cease your persecutions of this poor girl, whose greatest misfortune is the fact of her being your child."

"For shame!" broke from Kathleen. "What you say is false." And at once she moved toward her mother, who swept an arm about her waist with a glad cry.

"Only a few minutes ago, my darling," Mrs. Kennaird now eagerly said, "he had the insolence to tell me that unless you treated me with scorn — *scorn*, mind you, my dear! — he would wholly give you up."

Kathleen flushed, and curled her lip. "If he wants me to hate you," she said, "he will find himself woefully in error."

"I don't ask anything so unnatural," here struck in Alonzo, "as that you should hate your mother. But I demand of you that you shall both hate and despise her views of living. I know something of her past life; I've taken pains to inquire. She is one of those women who go about the world making themselves firm and sworn foes of the sanctity of marriage."

"Hear him!" said Mrs. Kennaird, to her daughter. "And you'll stand this! You'll marry the man who can so slander your mother!"

"Truth and slander live miles apart," said Alonzo. "Kathleen," he went on, with his entire mien racked by agitation, "if you come to me at all you must come with no mere worldly regrets."

"You 'must come'! Listen! — listen!" mocked Mrs. Kennaird, while she drew the girl closer to her breast. "Was there ever such an autocrat? He's

repulsed you once, my dear. Will you let him do so again? Where is your womanly spirit?"

"It's here," said Kathleen, drawing herself up and touching her bosom with one hand while she gave Alonzo the haughtiest look he had ever seen bred in those limpid eyes. "There's an end of everything between you and me," she went on. "I hope I may never see you again, but if we *should* meet, be sure I'll never speak to you. . . . Come, mamma."

The two women left the room together, and each gave him a glance across her shoulder. Mrs. Kennaird's, which was one of disdainful triumph, he did not see; but Kathleen's, which brimmed equally with anger and melancholy, haunted him through many a future day.

## V.

HE had received a frightful blow, and what made it all the bitterer was a nascent conviction that it had been half of his own giving. Still, he must forthwith face the irreparable. He had played into the hands of Mrs. Kennaird just when the game had begun to go dead against her. Perhaps like a mad fool he had done this, and now life held no mitigant sorceries that could reverse his doom. Pride had assumed in him an abnormal tyranny; he had expected of Kathleen preposterous things. Or thus he would assure himself one minute, denying it the next. "Had I been in her place and she in mine," he would passionately argue, "would I have talked of being 'able to bear it all'? Good Heavens! what had she to 'bear'? Not owning a peck or two of diamonds, having three or four pairs of gloves at a time instead of twelve dozen? And she called this *loving*! Why, if she were really true to me, really worth possessing for a wife, I'd love the feeling of starvation while I kept bread from my own mouth to put it in hers."

His sister, Mrs. Van Santvoord, who now and then dropped in upon him with woebegone face and a voice which had lately acquired several new bleating notes, happened to be present, one morning, when he spoke aloud just such thoughts as these.



"Well, Lonz," she said, "you can't blame a girl who's been all her life a beggar for having a shock when she hears you're almost one yourself."

"Oh, I don't blame her, Kitty. I only wish my loss of fortune would have taken with her the one form which makes perfect sympathy possible ; that is all. I mean self-forgetfulness, you know." He gave a quick, yet heavy sigh. "But it's so absurd, I find, to expect anything from anybody. We're all a race of egotists, little and big."

"You're out of the great crowd, Lonz ; you always were," said Kitty, with that kind of drawing-room wail which she had got into the way of using, and with each corner of her mouth a tragic droop. "I've often wondered why you didn't go oftener to church ; you think so much about other people besides yourself ; and that, they say, is the essence of religion."

"I begin to believe, Kitty, that it's the essence of folly."

"No, you don't, Lonz. . . . Oh, dear, how I wish I could take the awfulness of it as you do !"

"Come, now," said her brother, laying a hand on her shoulder, and for an instant gazing down cheerily into her gloomful eyes. "We've each got six thousand a year left. Uncle Crawford says so, and there isn't any doubt of it. Think, Kit ; there are great multitudes of people who'd consider that a fortune — and a huge one, too."

"Oh, I know, I know ! But those are just the kinds of things you can say to yourself and get comfort out of. I can't. I'm only a mere little fly that

dances in the sun, Lonz, and that gets torpid and dismal the moment there's no sun to dance in."

"But you've got a fair amount of sun left, Kit."

"Oh, *don't!* If . . if it were *nine* thousand a year, I'd feel able to hold my head up. Yes, I've figured matters down to that. One can escape the real horrors of poverty on nine thousand a year. But six . . Ugh! it's . . it's destitution!"

"And I suppose," said Alonzo, watching her with a curious smile, "that your noble Hector has been talking like this to his treasured Andromache? Eh, my dear?"

"Hector? I—I scarcely *see* him. If it were not that I hate divorce and separation so, I'd"—

"Yes, I understand." As he thus spoke Alonzo settled himself quite close to his sister on a little lounge that she occupied. He took her gloved hand in his and began absently yet somehow quite tenderly to fondle it. "Now, tell me, Kit, dear: you don't dream of helping him with your six thousand, do you?"

"Helping him? Good gracious, no! How could I? Besides, he's got a position of some sort. It's connected with a club in Baltimore. He originally came from Baltimore, you know."

"Yes. I wish he hadn't. That is, I wish he'd remained more loyal to the city that gave him birth. And this club position . . what is it? Not a waiter's, I hope. If so, I don't believe he'd stay long in it. Waiters must be civil in order to please, poor fellows—and they mustn't be lazy."

"Lonz! Oh, no, it's a kind of superintendentship. They say gentlemen take such places."

"Gentlemen! Really! And he—but go on."

"Well, there isn't much more to tell. He'll fill the position—at least, he said to me this morning he would. It's two thousand a year."

"And that means separation?"

"Of course it does, Lonz. You don't think I'd go on there with him, do you?"

"Then you'll stay alone here in New York."

"I? Why, yes. Alone in my new horrid quarters."

"They're not so horrid, Kitty. They're far too handsome for six thousand a year. You might manage them on nine."

"Mercy, Lonz! I know so little about money-matters. But you'll be here; you'll . . . take care of me, won't you?"

"Pay your debts, do you mean?" said Alonzo, smiling.

"No, not that. Poor Lonz! how can you? You'll only have six thousand a year yourself." And she patted his arm, in dainty condolence.

"Kitty," came the reply, very seriously spoken, "I've something to tell you. Don't start, now, and look as if you'd heard the rumbles of an earthquake. Promise me that when Hector goes away you'll live so that no one will talk."

"Lonz! I" —

"Never mind defending yourself. I don't say that you've done wrong as it is."

"Lonz, I never have! I've only" —

"You've only been imprudent. I always knew it. There — kiss me on the lips, Kitty, and promise you won't be imprudent any more."

She gave him the kiss, and wound her arms about him almost passionately while she did so. "My brother! my brother!" she said. "You're so clever — you always could read people so keenly! . . . But horrible things *might* have happened, if" —

"If it hadn't been that you're at heart an honorable woman, dear," he softly broke in. "Oh, I know, Kitty, you've had your temptations. What woman hasn't had them, treated as you've been by such a beast as your husband?" Kitty was crying now, but he kissed away her tears, and then brushed away a few of his own while he rose and stood over her. "It's odd," he went on, "that you should have named just the yearly sum you're going to get."

"Going to get?" she repeated, looking up at him in surprise.

"Yes. Nine thousand a year. I'm going to give you three thousand out of *my* income."

"And live yourself on three thousand?"

"Yes."

"You sha'n't do it, Lonz! You sha'n't! you sha'n't! It's lovely, it's *more* than lovely, of you; but I can't listen to it."

"My dear Kitty, everything has been arranged. Uncle Crawford will pay you over the money while I'm away."

"Away? You're going, then" —

"To Europe. I hope to earn and save some money

there; but, nevertheless, three thousand will amply cover my wants, living as I mean to live."

"Oh, but, Lonz"—

"Now, don't be absurd. I've told you before about my dear old friend Eric Thaxter's intimacy with the King of Saltravia.

"Yes."

"Well, Eric, I find, is the one of all my friends who has proved himself neither lukewarm nor totally unconcerned over my misfortunes. Long ago he wanted me, you remember, to accept an office under His Majesty, King Clarimond."

"Oh, it all comes back to me. You were to act as chief adviser in the collection of a great picture-gallery. And I said, 'Go, do go, and just see what a king and a court are like, even if you only stay two or three weeks.' How it all comes back to me now, Lonz! And you made fun of me, then, for a silly American snob. But you don't do so now."

"Oh, I don't make fun of the salary. It's no laughing matter." Here he told her how much it was, and added: "So, you see, I can afford to help you a little."

"Help me a little! Lonz, you're an angel! There was never such a brother. And you're really going?"

"It's all settled. Eric has been the angel. But I may come back in no time, like one of Bo Peep's missing sheep! You see, I've never before ventured to put my faith in princes. They tell us we mustn't, you know, Kit; they've been telling us so for several

centuries. I'm going to His Majesty as a kind of carpet-bagger, you know."

"Oh, nonsense. You're going as an American gentleman, and the intimate friend of the King's favorite."

"The King's favorite! If Eric, my independent Eric, heard any one call him that, I believe he'd shake the dust of Saltravia forever from his feet. There's no truckling to royalty with *him*, you may bet your life, Kitty."

"But I do hope," said the sister, after a little pause, which appeared to brim with congratulations joyful though silent, "that you'll not be kept from your painting, Lonz. I mean, that you'll have time to go on with it, and be the great artist you were cut out for."

"Cut out for with a very crooked pair of shears, I'm afraid. . . . No, Kitty, since *she* died from my days the old creative ambition has died too. And yet there's a queer longing left. Do you recollect that portrait of her which I began a little while after we were engaged?"

"Yes. I didn't see it, but everybody who did thought it" —

"Wonderful, of course. That is, they thought it policy to tell me so. . . . Well, I mean to take it with me, that portrait, and work on it in Saltravia during leisure moments. I've an idea of sending it her as a wedding present if I can ever make it really fine. She'll marry, beyond a doubt. That 'American push' of her mother's will succeed; why not? Kathleen's

beauty will resist even the horrible reputation of a fortune-hunter, which Mrs. Kennaird is so industrious in lifting to monumental heights."

"You love her just as much as ever, don't you, Lonz?" said his sister, with pity-kindled eyes.

He threw both hands impetuously into the air, and then let them fall at his sides with the gravest gesture of dejection.

"I love the memory of my lost faith in her!"

Kitty sighed. It seemed to her such a shame that this brother, in whose force and worth her superior knowledge of him had always taught her to believe, should not be able more speedily to divest his heart of a passion which could not but swell the tide of disaster whelming him. For to poor, weak, money-worshipping Kitty he had come out of trial with such a splendid grace and strength. Yesterday a sybarite, with his valets and his scented baths, his princely wardrobe and his dainty despotisms as a virtuoso, his effeminate caprices and his pranks that now trenched on silliness, now might have wrung smiles (you would think) from a bronze Dante, he was to-day, not merely full of serious reflections and aims, but mentally sinewed by the will to work and the philosophy that flouts despairing collapse.

"If she saw how brave he is," mused Mrs. Van Santvoord, "she would feel a pang of astonishment, not to speak of shame."

But she had already felt her pangs, had Kathleen, and writhed under the sudden scourge of conscience wielded during those intervals when resentment fell

to napping. News of his quiet fortitude had reached her, and of the stanch honor with which he had treated debts that another might excusably have shirked. For a good while she had hoped that he would write her the sort of letter which might at once destroy and reconstruct. But no such letter came, and constantly it occurred to her that the sole cause of its not coming was her own frigid farewell. The terms of that farewell were stern as though written in the blood of a dying passion. He must have felt this; and yet on his own side had he not called forth harshness by intolerable exactions?

"Let it be understood," Kathleen at length said to her mother; "I shall now never marry." She spoke with extreme hardness and bitterness; it was a tone which Mrs. Kennaird had of late learned to respect, just as some sovereign, in times of altering popular tradition, might begin to hold more and more perilous the surly grumbles of the proletariat.

"My dear," was the reply, "marriage is such a strange affair. If all roads lead to Rome, then it should be called the Rome of human experiences; for it is approachable by countless different avenues."

"I sha'n't ever reach it through the avenue of disappointment," exclaimed Kathleen. "Rest very sure of that."

"Oh, no," smiled her mother; "not if you choose otherwise. There always remains the route"—

"Of ambition?" Kathleen broke in, giving her delicate head a weary toss. "Oh, you forget I've



traveled by that road already, though the journey *has* been only half way."

"Kathleen!" said her mother, biting her lips.

"Yes," rang the girl's voice, full equally of satire and defiance, "I know every mile-stone there! You've been my *cicerone*, mamma, and an excellent one you've made."

"Kathleen! Kathleen!"

"Now I'm sick to the soul of this whole hideous business! People are making fun of us behind our backs worse than they did after that disgusting episode at Dendudlow Hall."

"Disgusting, my child?"

"Yes; there's no other word, and you know it. I heard yesterday (don't ask me who told me, for I'll answer 'yes' to every name you bring up) that they're calling you 'the saleslady' since my engagement was broken. Well, I've only this to say," Kathleen went on, throwing back her small, dark head with an effect as unconsciously beautiful as it was forlorn: "I'll no longer be trotted round at your pleasure, like a ticketed animal."

"Silence!"

"No, mamma, I *will* speak out. I was silent too long in those English days, and now I'll take a stand that you *must* recognize."

"I'll *not* recognize it! *You* die a spinster, indeed! When I've really made a great match for you, some day, you'll thank me. Let them sneer at us. They're all precisely as we are. I've done no more than every mother does with a daughter as handsome as you are,

I *won't* let you fling yourself away. No, not for ten years yet. Fortunately you're a beauty without being a blonde. Blondes are so apt to go all to pieces after they're five-and-twenty. You've my coloring, dear, and you should be thankful for it. Look at my skin for a woman of my age. One hates to be stupidly vain, but I'm a great advantage to you when we appear together. You're prophecy; I'm fulfillment. That means a great deal to the men. None of them with the least nicety of feeling would care to marry a girl who would degenerate into beefiness. And you'll be handsomer still than I (though you don't yet carry yourself *just* as I want), for you're taller, and you've a bend of the nostril, a curve of the cheek, an archness about the way the eyelid is fitted over the eyeball and the way in which it lifts or droops itself, which your poor, dear father gave you. And then there are your positively unique dimples, my dear"—

"Hush! hush!" broke in Kathleen. "If you want to play the jockey who shows my points off, you forget that there's no purchaser present. And if ever the purchaser comes, mamma, I warn you I'll take measures to spoil your coveted bargain."

Mrs. Kennaird shook her head with a grandly amiable disapproval. She never showed a hint of ire when Kathleen was in one of these desperate moods, —and they were moods that recently had grown frequent. Her diplomacy, of which she had large funds, forbade any such course, and her maternal ambition, which was fathomless and after a fashion sublime, weighted it with an added veto.

"You'll never wreck your own prospects, my dear, when the time comes. The star of your destiny has meant you for better things, after all, than to be the wife of that eccentric and somewhat vulgar Alonzo Lispernard, who, when stripped of his money, was in no sense"—

"Please don't refer to him," struck in Kathleen. "If you do, I shall simply leave the room."

"Oh, very well, my dear. Let us talk of other things. If you're sensible you'll go with me to the Dillworthys' this evening. It's true, they're entirely new people, but they've pushed themselves in, and at this late stage of their social audacity it would be absurd not to accept them."

"I've graver subjects than that to concern me, mamma. One of them is the way we've sunk in debt. It may be only a few hundreds, as you said so magnificently yesterday. But those few hundreds must be paid, and I mean to pay them. Do you know how? By selling every bit of the fine jewelry I possess, and some of my handsomer gowns as well. Then I want to go abroad and live in some cheap little German place . . . Stuttgart, or somewhere like that. There will be money enough to keep us both quietly, with none of the fume and strain of our odious past. I may not have happiness, but I shall have peace. I shall take off my ticket and sha'n't be for sale any longer. Ah, what a luxury! No jaded old omnibus-horse could feel more grateful when they unharness him for a good long rest!"

She spoke firmly enough, and yet with an occasional

hysteric throb in her voice that the ear of her listener plainly perceived. Mrs. Kennaird was a listener that day, of wondrous politic shrewdness. Kathleen must have her head for a little while, she had concluded. There was no other way of hereafter coercing her. It is possible that poor Kathleen, whose mind was much larger, just as her nature was much deeper, than that of her mother, never clearly grasped the latter's astonishing power to put her worldliness into practical use. Every day since Margaretta Kennaird had first looked upon her child to see that she was unwontedly fair, had been a steady persistence of resolve that this beauty should find its full matrimonial price. The shock of Alonzo's losses had been followed by a sense of relief at the ruptured engagement. He had never been good enough for the girl, after all. The gods had withdrawn their gifts only to restore them in more plenteous measure.

"Stuttgart," she thought. "Yes, we'll go there for a while, perhaps. There, or to Dresden, or some such place. Anything to humor her while she's like this. A little moping may do her good. If she's crossed now, and gets into tantrums and cries too much, it may seriously hurt her looks. But no Stuttgart, or any such place, for *us*, except temporarily! Bah! The stars in their courses wouldn't serve me quite so shabby a trick as that, though Heaven knows they've brought me ill enough since I left my pinafores." And with a subtle smile Mrs. Kennaird sought her room, to look over her evening gowns and

see which would produce the least tumbled effect at the Dillworthys' Delmonico dance that evening.

She went, though she went alone, and had a delightful time as well. There was nothing that so consoled her for all mental pain as the blaze of festal lights, the perfume of festal flowers, "the dancers dancing in tune," and all the merriment of a revel, however hollow it might be, provided patrician elements went to make it. More than once she had cured a nervous headache by just this means. Amid the assemblage to-night she held herself with all her old majesty and suavity. Quite as always, her male attendants were many, and though elderly, still of the most desired. She preferred but a sprinkling of younger devotees in her train; she considered it beneath the dignity of a woman as old as herself to receive an overplus of homage from striplings. That would have been almost as infelicitous as though she had condescended to dance; and while she did not dream of dancing, she nevertheless abhorred the *dais* consecrated to dowagers, but moved or stood near it, holding a little court of her own, while matrons of great wealth and caste sat behind her almost unheeded by the other sex. On the subject of her daughter's absence she was unreserved, even voluble. "Yes," she would murmur, with a sad little wave or two of her fan, "poor, dear Kathleen thought it best not to come. He has treated us both, you know, in the most shocking way. My dear child was devotion itself to him, just as was I. Kathleen would gladly have gone with him into

the lowest depths of poverty, and I — what have I ever refused my darling girl, and how could I now stand between her and the fulfillment of her heart's fondest wishes? But he came to us cold, cynical, suspicious — oh, it was too horrible! He listened, I suppose, to slanders concerning Kathleen, and accused her of not caring to continue the engagement. Even this would not have alienated the loving spirit he so wronged, but when he cruelly insulted me in Kathleen's presence it was too much even for *her* perfect devotion. I have remained wholly passive throughout. Kathleen has broken the ties between them, and she has done so in pure desperation at his utter brutality. . . . I am astonished that he is not here to-night; it would be so like him to come after the dreadful way in which he has treated us. But I bear him no ill-will. I was prepared, indeed, to almost overwhelm him with my sympathy."

But Alonzo, far from appearing at Delmonico's that evening, was absorbed in preparations for his departure. Events that were chiefly of a financial sort and had to do not only with the settlement of his own and Mrs. Van Zantvoord's wrecked patrimony, but with the closing up on his and on his uncle Crawford's part of a business hopelessly maimed and soiled, kept delaying him until beyond the early weeks of spring. When at last he sailed for Europe it was after having received from Eric Thaxter new assurances of a most cordial welcome. "In other days," ran one of Eric's letters, "my request that you would come and accept the court position you have now consented to fill, was

proffered in a mood rather of jest than earnest. Yet circumstance has conspired in more ways than one to make bright reality of what was then but a rosy dream. I shall have you here in Saltravia, my friend, and that unhappy loss of your fortune is not the sole reason I have secured you. The King has for some time reposed in my hands (those hands which have had the luck so to please him as regards their architectural plan-drawings) all power of appointing the art superintendent of his realm. I gave this office, not very long ago, to one of our fellow-countrymen, an artist of no mean talents and of apparently the coolest head. But no sooner had he donned, so to speak, his insignia, than arrogance and effrontery were mild names for him. But what could I do? There he strutted through the halls of our beautiful museum with a carriage you would have called immodest in a peacock. Unless I greatly err, the poor King was the only one of us whom he did not presume to patronize. How to get rid of Mr. Jerningham was for some time a baffling problem. I could not discharge him, as no actual offense could be laid at his door. But finally I hit upon a way. Of necessity he would be absent for days at a time, and I cleared my throat augustly, one afternoon, and informed him that during these absences a co-superintendent must be appointed to take his place. He bristled at this, just as I had expected, and asked me why a 'co-superintendent' should be created, and not an officer of lower status than his own. I endeavored to explain precisely why, and in so doing I am afraid that with

intention I roused his lordly wrath, for a disgusted resignation followed, and it came just in the nick of time. During that same week your letter reached me, telling of that fateful suicide. The position was ready for you, and waits now your gracious occupancy. Meanwhile Jerningham, still a resident of Saltravia, poisons the air with malign tales about my jealousy of his success at winning royal countenance. A withered sister, who adores him, helps to spread these silly reports. They don't injure me; I am not, after all, half so unpopular in Saltravia as Mr. and Miss Jerningham would try to make out. But I feel it my duty, dear Alonzo, to warn you that you will find in these people two ready-made foes. And yet their enmity is harmless as a sheep's bleat, and, I regret to add, hardly more amusing or dramatic." . . .

On reaching Saltravia, after a brief stay in Paris, Alonzo alighted from the train just at sunfall. His journey had been long and tiring, but toward the latter part of it soft hills, green as emerald, had gradually greatened, affecting him from the window at which he sat like giant spirits of woodland hospitality, that linked their god-like hands in continual increase of greeting. But the light-built station, shaped with airiest delicacy, brought him a greeting gladder still. Eric Thaxter grasped his hand before he had taken ten steps.

"Dear old Eric!" he said, "you look just the same. Big and handsome and yellow-bearded as ever."

Eric smiled, and pressed his friend's hand with a



vigor that brought back the *atelier* days in Paris, not to mention hours of merry abandonment in the Boulevard Saint Michel.

"Don't think of your luggage," said Eric. "All will be attended to." He caught from his friend's grasp the vouchers held there. "Come," he continued, after fleeting converse with two liveried servants. In another instant he had thrown an arm about Alonzo's neck, while they walked onward together.

"It seems so natural to meet you here in Saltravia!" he said. "It is like having the moon rise, or the breeze blow. For I am sure you will like it here, unless the weather becomes refractory."

"One would say," murmured Alonzo, looking about him, "that the skies were always kind to so enchanting a spot as this."

"Do you like it?" flashed Eric Thaxter. "I was sure you would!"

"Like it! And we are near a railway station!"

"Yes, my friend, but did you observe the tunnel as you approached? It is three miles long."

"You call it a tunnel?"

"Well, causeway, if you prefer. In any case, our trains plunge through the valley with a kind of sleepy fierceness. It is the King's doing. And, if you will cast your eye backward along the route of the railway by which you have just come, you will see nothing but a series of undulant green embankments, ablaze with spots of the choicest flowers."

"Exquisite," said Alonzo. . . . "But one has lovelier things to look at here," he added, throwing his

gaze to right and left, and then letting it dwell in quiet ecstasy on the prospect that fronted him.

"Shall we drive to your lodgings, or shall we walk?" sounded Eric's voice.

"Drive? . . . Walk?" fell from his hearer, in dazed monotone.

"After all, it's but a step," pursued the guide. "And you really like Saltravia, then? I was sure you would."

"Like it!" faltered Alonzo.

He had not yet made up his mind whether he was in town or country. No one ever did who first came to this magic little region. True, there were no side-walks, no pavements. But roads and paths that looked like huge and endless white ribbons were bordered by villas of fairy-like fragility, and yet often of spacious exterior. Like an immense curved sword, flung down upon the velvet sweeps of turf, a river blazed below the dying splendors of sunset. And such a sunset! It was seen between two towering mountains, whose peaks melted in purple and golden cloud, which clung to either of their westward slopes and wrought a nebulous effect of two celestial stairways. The valley, thus dreamily and magnificently bastioned, lay bathed in glory quiet yet intense. You seemed to look within the gates of paradise, and past them also, where heavenly meadowlands drowsed and brooded.

Alonzo, almost drunken with the beauty of his environments, had scarcely noted that figures on the

hard, clear-cut walk which he and Eric traversed were passing in groups or pairs.

"And this," he at length faltered, "is Saltravia! You have often told me of its beauty, but" —.

"Oh, this is nothing," broke in Eric's cool and pleasant voice. "One gets these effects in other places. Our sunsets here are apt to be a little sensational. I'm envious of them. They interfere with my architectural improvements. . . . Dear boy, don't lose your head; you're positively gasping."

"Oh, let me gasp!" exclaimed Alonzo. "It's such a keenly novel feeling—in such a cause."

"Ah, but your emotion is premature," objected his friend. "You have not yet seen Saltravia in all its fine reality. I resent that sunset. It destroys values, as you artists would say. What a pity that one cannot suppress a sunset when it becomes too sanguinary, just as if it were a rebellion!"

"But you never have rebellions in Saltravia," said Alonzo.

"No; they're quite too fond of the King. I can imagine a revolution here, but it would be conducted on principles wholly artistic."

"Oh, Eric, Eric!" cried Alonzo; "you're not a bit changed. You're precisely as if we had met yesterday. Who but you would have thought of an artistic revolution?"

Eric, who had a pale, calm, strong-featured face, and who often said his most surprising things without the vestige of a smile, now answered, in very serious tones:

"I assure you, my dear Lonz, that the pictur-

esqueness of massacre, without its unpleasant qualities, such as the actual taking of human life, could be cultivated as a sort of *fête* with striking success. The Athenians performed their tragedies in the open air; why should not we Saltravians, in a larger way, repeat bloodlessly some of the great epochs of history? . . . Let us talk to the King about it. He is coming to meet you. He is very receptive, you will find, to all original ideas. If you and he do not swiftly like one another I shall be pierced with disappointment."

"The King . . . coming to meet me!" stammered Alonzo. "So soon? I—I am not prepared for an audience with His Majesty."

The last blaze of the setting sun now abruptly ceased, and in a second the utmost verge of the valley grew a dusky green. In this altered light the river took a chastened luster like that of wet silk, and here and there along its edges, or on the flanks of the robust and darkening mountains, multicolored villas gleamed forth in fairy-like profusion, each with its engirding garden a riot of bloom. Directly before him, and only a few hundreds of yards away, Alonzo perceived a throng of ladies and gentlemen approaching. In the dimmer yet clearer air he could discern that the feminine shapes were winsome, rich of garb, and that the masculine ones betrayed, in their way, an equal elegance.

Confident that this dainty multitude meant the sovereign and his attendant courtiers, Alonzo drew backward, and in a turmoil of sharp embarrassment grasped the arm of his friend.

## VI.

ERIC'S voice, however, struck reassuringly on his ear.

"Yes, my dear Alonzo, it *is* the King. I had no idea that he would pay us this honor. But he is so exquisitely gracious that one never knows what new act of kindness he will commit. The persons who surround him are quite harmless beings, I assure you. They perhaps possess all the native ill-breeding of high-bred aristocrats, but are well aware that the faintest act of discourtesy toward any one whom Clarimond favors would promptly end in their exile from the court. I pray you, have not the least sense of awkwardness. The King never permits it to live in his presence. He has a really wondrous gift — that of destroying idle ceremony. Do not address him as 'your majesty.' He greatly dislikes that form, so separative and so constantly reminiscent of his royal rank. I am sorry enough, dear Lonz, that you should see him so soon. I had wanted that we should talk for hours about him together before you and he were brought face to face. He is so remarkable, so preëminently distinguished. I am sure there was never a king like him in all the world before. I sometimes think there has never been a king either so great or so good, though that, of course, is saying much. But if our century is productive of anything

interesting and extraordinary it should be her kings, which are both anomalies and absurdities. I think Clarimond plainly realizes this fact. I could have consumed hours in talking of him to you before you and he met, if it had not been his caprice to come and greet you as he has done. . . . He has just left the palace, you know. You can get a good view of it yonder on the spur of the mountain, now that the sun has sunk. I called it my bee-in-the-bonnet, that palace, until it was quite finished. Do you care for it?"

"Care for it! Good Heavens, Eric!"

Alonzo felt his blood beat as only the blood of an artist can when he gazes upon work that seems to him noble and grand. The faded daylight had now brought out new tints, dark and rich, in sward and foliage. From a slope of the dim and majestic mountain towered King Clarimond's abode. As a masterpiece of building it was no less delicate than sublime. Wrought entirely of white marble, it loomed against the undulant lawns and terraces that compassed it in an intricate maze of turrets and spires. It was enormous with respect to the space that it covered, and yet so lace-like in its ethereal proportions that you might have named it the very filament or cobweb of architecture. To Alonzo, the King's deep regard for Eric was instantaneously plain. Such commingled airiness and solidity, such flower-like blossoming in stone, such frost-like beauty and grace blent with dignity and power, could be but the work of genius alone. It flashed through the gazer's mind that per-

haps Ludwig of Bavaria, mad though he possibly was, admired and revered Wagner no more than Clarimond of Saltravia admired and revered the creator of this enchanting edifice.

"It's a magnificent bee to have had in one's bonnet, my dear Eric," presently murmured Alonzo. "In this light, seen as we see it now, its loveliness appears miraculous."

"Those are words that drop right down into my heart's core," said Eric. And now, as the group of people drew nearer, one figure quietly parted itself from the others.

"The King," whispered Alonzo's friend, and with an outstretched hand and a face that seemed to radiate sunshine, Clarimond of Saltravia advanced.

"You are most welcome," he said, in very fluent and perfect French. "You see," he continued, "I do not wait to be presented to you, but take the liberty, like this, of claiming your acquaintance."

This form of phrase from royalty might well have been called ultra-graciousness, not to say condescension. But the young King who now spoke somehow contrived to make it appear like neither. His voice was rich and sweet, his manner affable without the vaguest trace of patronage, and his person irresistibly charming. Alonzo quickly felt that he could not be called by any means a man physically faultless, and yet in his tall, compact figure, his curly golden locks and his radiant gray eyes, dwelt a world of attraction.

Almost before he knew it the stranger found his sense of strangeness oddly vanishing. Clarimond

made him acquainted among the ladies and gentlemen of his little court with no more seeming difficulty than by a wave of the hand, a happy sentence, or even a fleeting smile. The manners of those who composed his train were certainly an aid to this easy method of introduction. Indeed, as the minutes now slipped by, Alonzo began to have the sensation that he had entered within a circle of delicious sorcery where human nature, like that other nature which towered and undulated so picturesquely on every side of him, teemed with only the fairest lures. He soon found himself walking in the direction of the palace, solely accompanied by the King. All the others, including Eric Thaxter, had drawn a little backward, and their gay conversation floated so buoyantly and fearlessly on the scented evening air as to dissipate every hint of that austerity which we are told usually surrounds a monarch.

"You have been away but a short time from America?" asked Alonzo's companion, regarding him softly and yet with what he suspected to be veiled keenness as well.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied Alonzo, wondering if Eric's English veto as regarded "your majesty" might be thus translated into French.

But the title failed to please. Immediately Clarimond placed his hand on the speaker's arm. "Let it be 'monsieur' between us," he said: "I like that better. . . . But you were in Paris for a little while before coming here, as I think Eric told me," ran his



next words. "And you like Paris? Or are you in that one respect un-American?"

"I like it beyond all other places," Alonzo answered. And then he added: "Except Saltravia."

"Saltravia is perhaps the most opposite place to Paris," smiled Clarimond, "that the world contains. Besides, you do not know it yet."

"Ah, but I have been able to see how beautiful it is."

"That is because your friend has made it so."

"These airy villas are his work, monsieur, no less than your astonishing palace?"

"Nearly all are his work. As soon as I felt how remarkable was his genius for architecture, I said to him, in so many words, 'Transform my little kingdom for me.' And he has done so."

"But surely with great expedition."

The King laughed, shrugging his shoulders. "Our Eric declares himself lazy. Is it not absurd? True, I have assisted him with large funds and hordes of workmen. But he has labored with fine industry."

"A labor of love, surely."

"Of art, which never succeeds in its achievements unless love spurs and guides it. One can do nothing well without loving to do it—or so I imagine. . . . This particular sweep of country represents Eric's masterpiece of effort. Westward are the homes of people who have neither the fortunes nor the culture to live artistically. And on the farther side of the palace Saltravia assumes an aspect which is inevitably

more commonplace. There are the two large hotels, the four celebrated springs and the casino. Eric improved rather than rebuilt all that. It is more populous, far less rural than the prospects which now greet us, and may remind you of certain places like Carlsbad, or Homburg, or Baden. Eric has his own little abode, however, in which, I believe, you are to inhabit a suite of chambers. It is near the palace, and commands a view of just these heights and dells for which you have already declared a liking. In a short time we will reach it, and there, monsieur, I will venture to leave you. To-morrow, after you and your old friend have had time for a memorial chat, and when a few hours of refreshing slumber have followed the excellent glass of wine which I am sure you will get at dinner, I shall be greatly pleased to receive you at the palace. We will walk through the picture-galleries, talk a little over what is there already, and then ask one another what sorts of unsecured canvases would prove the most desirable. Eric tells me that he trusts no one's perception of thorough worth in art so implicitly as he trusts your own."

Alonzo felt himself reddening with doubt of self. Here, in this incomparable spot, almost under the shadow of that glorious marble poem which filled him with new regard for the soul whence it had sprung—to hear words of expectant confidence in his own powers of æsthetic insight! It seemed almost like a merciless mockery. He shook his head, and in very faltering tones responded ;

"My dear friend has overrated me to a sad degree, monsieur, I assure you."

"Hush," said the King, with a gesture of playful imperiousness. "If you want me to respect your abilities, you must not begin by depreciating Eric's critical gifts. Remember that I have reason to swear by them. And if you doubt your own capacity to dive into the big European sea of art and fetch me up some of the finest pearls that lie there, such lack of faith will merely increase my own in yourself, since it is never hard to associate distinction with modesty. . . . But here we are, almost at Eric's very doors. You are doubtless tired, and I have come to meet you, I am well aware, with a kind of pitiless unexpectedness."

As the King paused he put his hand about that of Alonzo, letting it rest there with a transient yet earnest pressure. Nothing could have been more simply royal than the way in which he performed this quiet act, while standing at the arched and ivy-muffled gateway which led to Eric's monastic residence of dark-gray stone. . . . To Alonzo his departure and that of his merry court were as graceful as had been their coming and their salutations, but a brief while since. When they had all passed away toward the grand approaches of the neighboring palace, he turned to Eric with an agitated sob in the throat.

"For a poor devil like myself, old fellow, such goodness positively is painful!"

Eric fondly took his arm, and they walked together below the Gothic gateway up toward the little round-towered mediæval abode which rose just beyond. . . .

"My dear Lonz, this is one of the happiest moments I have ever known since I came to Saltravia, and saying that certainly is saying much. . . . But for you to call yourself a 'poor devil'—you, whom I once envied as the luckiest of mortals, with your talents, your good looks and your millions! It's like dreaming a grisly dream."

"I never had any real talents, Eric. Like my good looks, they're only something you've dreamed."

"Preposterous! You're slow, I admit."

"Slow? I'm the merest plodder."

"But some day you might produce a masterpiece. And some day I believe you will. As it was, all that wealth stood in the way of it. Now your luxury slips from you like a purple robe, and below it is the dress of plain taffetas that an occasional paint-stain will rather adorn than harm. Besides, you will have another potent incentive."

"You mean?" —

"Leisure. Most men who lose their money are in a turmoil of distress about their butchers' bills. But, after all, though the salary allowed you by the King is not precisely enormous" —

"It is exceedingly liberal, Eric."

"—Still, for Saltravia, it can't be called meagre. And you will find, my dear Lonz, that it possesses one pungent charm: you can so often draw it with an entirely guilty conscience."

"I see. You mean that I shall not have much to do."

"You will have a great deal to do, in one sense —

little in another. The King, you know, is enormously rich, and has (notwithstanding his many charities) a passion for purchasing and possessing what is beautiful in art. He will require you, at the end of every three months or so, to show him a certain proof of faithful stewardship."

"I quite understand, Eric. I must account to him for the sums of money that I have expended."

"Good Heavens!" cried Eric, giving one of his laughs, which smote the bland evening air with an almost flute-like sweetness; "you must do nothing of the sort. If you fail to convince Clarimond that you have made your purchases with avoidance of all rash and reckless economies—that you have, in other words, been prudently and discreetly extravagant—I am not at all sure what adverse views he may adopt regarding your proper endowments for the position you have assumed. He would prefer to take for granted that you have brought him treasures of art which have been rather chosen for their excessive ideal value as bits of true beauty than because fashion or false tradition had touched them with any vulgar spell. . . . But I babble on, and you are fatigued. You long for your bath, for a change of linen, and then for a quiet little dinner, at which you may wash down more of my inanities with some really choice wine, a gift from the King himself." . . .

They presently passed within doors, but before they did so Alonzo begged to linger a few moments on the terrace which they had now ascended. The huge hills had deepened from violet to the mellowest azure,

and the hard, white roads glimmered below a heaven whose crystal was but newly invaded by the silver shyness of earlier stars. Lights had begun to shine in the palace casements, and in those of the glooming villas besides. From the heart of the dimmed sunset beamed a pale pool of sky that the two sable mountains flanked like coasts, and midway between either, like a water-lily of throbbing fire, burned the evening star. Freshening each instant with the advent of darkness, a breeze played at so brisk a speed along the valley that you might well wonder how it could bear such heavy odors of pine, of garden flowers and of wild flowers as well, in its viewless but dewy clasp. . . .

The dwelling of his friend, as Alonzo soon found, was in no way suggestive of being habited by a king's petted idol. Sobriety and simplicity prevailed everywhere, yet the cloister-like somberness never became too grave, and now and then it revealed bursts of refreshing brilliance in a fall of rare tapestry, or a stretch of blazoned window. While the two friends tarried late that evening in the groined dining-room with its tall wax candles (having been left to their cigars, coffee and Burgundy by a servant of perfect training), they talked of many things. But chief among these topics the recent troubles of Alonzo stood forth. He told all that had passed between himself and Kathleen, finally adding :

"I don't altogether approve my own conduct, now that I look back upon it."

"Approve it!" exclaimed Eric. "My dear boy, you are delicious. Why, it's just as if Caligula should

declare to-day that he thought he had behaved a trifle impolitely yesterday."

"Really, Eric, I was not prepared"——

"To be called cruel? Of course you were not. You expected to have me agree with you that you've been a martyr."

"I *have* been — to that horrible Mrs. Kennaird."

"But by your own showing you quite defeated her. Kathleen was willing to defy her authority."

"Willing — yes."

"And you wanted the poor girl to prostrate herself before you in an ecstasy of submission. Of course you did. All lovers, in like circumstances, do. . . . Don't bite your lips and glare at me, dear Lonz. It shows in you a new spirit of revolt for which I am totally unprepared. Always before this you have recognized my right to scold you when you deserved it."

"But you've never before scolded me unjustly, Eric. . . . Let us talk, however, of something else. How is it that you, so sapient in the ways of lovers, have found no wife among all these charming ladies of Saltravia?"

"I marry a Saltravia lady!" broke from Eric, while he nearly spilled the glass of Chambertin that he was lifting to his lips. "You might as well talk of my marrying some celestial creature who had lately arrived here from another orb."

"What *do* you mean? I thought they adored you."

"Some of them detest me, my dear Lonz."

"Ah, jealousy of the King?"

"Partly. But there's another cogent reason. Many of them look upon me as a hideous vandal."

"A vandal . . . you?"

"Yes—and it's so odd when one thinks of it. A vandal of culture! I swooped down on their dear valley, and shattered (at Clarimond's command) its immemorial ugliness. Talk of the romance of the past! Adobe huts are scarcely dimaler than were some of their ancestral lodgments. Oh, yes, I've been to them, as it were, a very barbarian of civilization."

"But this was the King's tyranny, not yours."

"They imagine that I have put all these atrocious refinements into Clarimond's head. They realize that he is that anomalous and unprecedented person, a nineteenth century king; but they blame me, at the same time, for aggravating his fallacies."

"Then they think it a fallacy to believe in surrounding oneself with beauty?"

"They prefer to surround themselves with memories. And they had many. Saltravia, you know, is ridiculously old. After all, it was a very stern demolition. I probably tore up hearthstones that were eight or nine centuries old. I was quite pitiless."

"Pitiless as Caligula?"

"Ah, Lonz, you're angry at me!"

"No."

"Well, well, persevere in your grudge, and you'll make me apologize." Here Eric looked with melancholy at his half-consumed cigar. "An apology, you know, is the murder of a prejudice. And I'm so



fond of my prejudices! They're my cherished children. I spend half my time in training them to live thrifty, reputable lives. Besides, we're not to begin our bachelor days together by even the semblance of a quarrel."

Alonzo started. "Are we to live here together, you and I?" he asked.

"Not unless you desire it."

"Oh, Eric!" And Alonzo's eyes filled with tears. "In this lovely castle!"

"A castle *pour rire*, my friend!"

"But—but, *Eric*! It's too infernally sweet of you!"

"Infernally sweet is just what I want to be called. It reminds me of *fin de siècle* art. It makes me think of Leconte de Lile's poetry. Baudelaire (as that wonderful sayer of happy things, Oscar Wilde, not long ago declared when he dropped into Saltravia and spent a few days in the palace with Clarimond) is chiefly great as a poet for having discovered the beauty in ugliness. Nothing except that is left us now in this unacademic age. The moment that one is classical nowadays he is denounced as commonplace."

But Alonzo was not listening. If his wounded life needed any balsamic touch it was just these tidings that here in this lovely valley, in this choice abode, he should secure a lasting home with the friend of his heart.

"It is too kind, too generous of you, Eric," he at length found voice. "And when I make my trips

here and there about the continent you have decided that I am always to return to — yourself ?”

“Unless you are very bored. Then you will be frank and tell me, and then we shall certainly quarrel. For the instant that I shall become conscious that I have bored anybody my egotism will leap forth like a tiger. It’s a crime of which no one has yet had the audacity to accuse me. I keep a jeweled eastern dirk ready to plunge into any such offender ; for when he commits his offense I wish my crime as an assassin to possess at least the saving grace of picturesqueness.”

“Oh, Eric, how good you are, how good you are !”

“Crime,” continued Eric, pouring himself another glass of Burgundy, “was never so disreputably prosaic as now. That reminds me, dear Lonz. I shall speak to the King to-morrow on this particular subject. I shall ask him if he will not kindly punish any new act of assassination at which the weapon used has been of an inferior and vulgar sort, with something prettily sixteenth century in the way of torture previous to the actual infliction of death.”

“I am back with you again in Paris,” smiled Alonzo, “while listening, like this, to all your serious absurdities. But are you sure that if I don’t take the place of any Saltravian bride I shall not stand in the way of one with a different nationality ? You tell me that the hotels off yonder by the springs are often peopled by American residents.”

“Oh, yes. They come there in summer, though they have not yet fully found out the marvelous quality of the springs. You see, before the unex-

pected accession of Clarimond to the throne, Saltravia had been for years in desuetude. The old King, his kinsman, ill and half blind for nearly twenty years, had a loathing of foreigners, and resisted even the request of so august an authority as the Emperor himself that the hotels should be redecorated and made attractive for a wholly new order of guests."

"And Clarimond has changed all that. He opens his arms to Americans. And you? Don't you open yours to any one feminine American in particular?"

Eric answered at first with a shrug. "My dear boy, I've been so horribly busy. Besides" . . .

"Ah, there's a 'besides'?"

"Oh, a very commonplace one. If you recall, I staid on in Paris for a good while after you left." His voice fell, and for an instant there were tears in it. "Some day I'll tell you just what happened. Only, don't ask me until I offer to tell you, Lonz, and that may be never." . . . He suddenly tossed his large, virile head, and gave his yellow beard a quick, nervous pull. In another moment he was the old radiant trifler, with not a hint of that hidden sorrow which it occurred to his hearer that he might possibly never learn. "Frankly, as I've now made up my mind, I could never marry an American woman unless she were a mute."

"Eric . . . what do you mean?"

"The voice of the American woman, my dear Lonz, is a horror!"

Alonzo laughed. "Why except the American man?"

"I don't. But one doesn't marry the American man."

"True, one doesn't. But I've known not a few American girls whose voices"—

"Of course you have. So have I. Oh, yes, those exceptions are vocally enchanting. But the ordinary girl of my own country always reminds me, when she is charming, of a splendid full-blown thistle. There are few lovelier flowers than the thistle when seen in perfection. It has unique perfume, and a symmetry that repays the closest observance. But try to pluck it and you are sure to recoil."

"Bah," replied Alonzo, laughing; "it's the same affair with a moss-rose."

Eric frowned with a great gloom. "Lonz! you have done me the most scandalous injury. I can pardon the man who smites me on the cheek or who robs me from the person. But for him who wantonly spoils one of my similes I can only cherish a Borgian hatred."

Then they both broke into a laugh, their eyes meeting in amical joyance under the wax lights that beamed on their fruits and wine. "I won't admit your hatred to be quite Borgian," urged Alonzo, "for I'm sure this velvet Burgundy hasn't been poisoned."

"You poison it with your own sarcasms," returned Eric. . . . Then, after a slight pause: "There will be a late moon to-night. Shall we watch it for a minute from the terrace?"

They were presently standing together on the stone walk outside, feeling their temples fanned by a breeze

that seemed to blow straight from the ruddy moonrise at which they gazed. The moon herself moved through a lair of stagnant ebon cloud, edging it with spectral fire; but her light flooded the hollow of a great gorge in the mountain just below her, and stole from its coverts of clustered leafage shapes that were mystic enough for the pictured thoughts of a darkened soul. Alonzo had some such fancy as this, and had just lost himself in the easy witchery of it, when his friend's voice roused him with a faint, impatient cry.

"What is it?" he said, starting as if from a real dream.

"Look—the palace," replied Eric. "It's fairly ablaze with lights."

Alonzo turned, and saw that this was true, and that throngs of shadowy shapes were gathered in the grand courtyard before the wide-flung, illumined doors. Suddenly the crackings of whips were heard, and three or four vehicles, that might have been coaches of state, rolled into momentary distinctness, and were then swallowed again by the gloom.

"She has crossed the frontier once more, after numberless threats," muttered Eric. "Intolerable woman, to come at such a time as this! But so like her—so like her! It has all been premeditated, just to cause talk and to give trouble. Hark! they are cheering her."

Alonzo listened, and heard a volume of sound by no means deafening.

"Is it not absurd?" pursued Eric. "It's like an

*opéra-bouffe*, with grand chorus of Saltravian citizens, you know, about two dozen strong. And, what's absurder still, she's horribly unpopular here; they quite detest her."

"Of whom, pray, are you speaking?" asked Alonzo, with evident interest.

"Of the Princess of Brindisi, mother of the King, and the most insolent and arrogant woman in Europe."

## VII.

IT was indeed true that King Clarimond had abruptly received tidings which told him his mother had just crossed the Saltravian frontier. Between the Princess and himself relations of a most frosty character had existed for several years. Few people, however, remained long on good terms with the Princess. Her disposition was not merely overbearing; it brimmed with all the worst bigotries of the Dark Ages, and to say of her that she believed in the "divine rights of kings" would have been mildly to express her mental savagery. The course of her son and only child, Clarimond, had almost maddened her since his accession to the throne. She had detested his father, her first husband, the Archduke Conrad, and in Clarimond she saw the paternal traits accentuated, made more hideous, more nauseating. Conrad had presumed in her presence to air his loathsome republican doctrines, and his early death had seemed to her like a heavenly vengeance for such audacity. Marrying soon afterward an old Italian prince of great wealth and extreme conservatism, she again became a widow, before it even vaguely entered her head that the son whom she had left with his tutors and guardians in Saltravia stood the remotest chance of ever being king. The Princess adored Italy, and shrank from the cares of motherhood. Besides, were

not Conrad's people taking charge of the boy and his enormous fortune? But suddenly, when the sick old King lost his heir by a lightning-stroke of disease, and when only two other lives could be counted on between himself and the succession, Hildegarde, Princess of Brindisi, began to feel her spirit dilate with a haughty hope. For those two other heirs—had they not been sickly from their cradles, and was not one of them a fragile girl with a pulmonary ill of stubborn menace?

The girl died within a year after her brother, and the old King, who deeply loved her, became almost an imbecile through this double bereavement. Then tidings were brought the Princess in Naples that her son might soon inherit the rule of Saltravia, as both the reigning monarch and his last-left child were at the point of death. It was now that she hurried to her own child, whom she had seen only at intervals, and in a bored, perfunctory way, during the past decade. But Clarimond, taking the reins of government at an age when his wrists were quite sinewy enough to hold them, had no sympathy with his mother's dictates and desires. To the Princess his views, his tendencies, his avowals were a mingled amazement and disgust.

"I am covered with remorse and shame," she would say to her intimates, "that this rebel against all the most sacred customs and precedents of royalty should actually be my son! He will bring Saltravia to the verge of ruin; he will infuriate the Emperor;



he will compromise himself past remedy, and plunge me into untold embarrassments."

Her new position had caused her to surround herself with a suite of ladies and gentlemen in waiting. There are always people ready to play sycophants for those on whom a throne has cast its shadow, and if she had chosen to organize a political party in opposition to her son the task would not have been difficult. But in spite of her indignant disapproval, she shrank from such a course. After all, though a cousin twice removed of the Emperor whom she so professed to venerate, her new greatness had come to her from Clarimond alone. For a good while she remained in Saltravia, treated with faultless though somewhat sarcastic deference by the son whom she had so long neglected, and then, angered into hysteria by his new intimacy with a young adventuring American architect who was to demolish all the old time-hallowed structures and rear horrible brand-new ones in their place, she gathered her little household about her and fled to her beloved Italy.

The King, who had remained courteous as he was obdurate, simply shrugged his shoulders at her departure, and breathed a long sigh of relief.

"She is incorrigible," he said to Eric, "and I find her as hard to argue with as if she had been a figure that had stepped forth from one of my precious bits of antique tapestry, coif on head and hawk on wrist. I shall continue to act just as if she had never annoyed me by her curious worm-eaten prejudices,

and I shall write her regularly, once a month, letters full of the most duteous filial sentiments."

This resolve Clarimond faithfully carried out. The Princess meanwhile, though she had retreated, had not given up her battle. She was secretly agitated by a dread that her son would make some terrible democratic marriage ; for he had already shocked her by asserting that he thought morganatic unions revolting and even criminal, and there was no written law in his little realm against a sovereign wedding whomsoever he chose.

Repeatedly, of late months, the Princess had written her intention of coming to see the new palace. Her son had given courteous assent to this arrangement, while inwardly groaning at the parade of ceremony and punctilio which it would be certain to engender. Now at last, after many false alarms, a telegram had abruptly come to him, stating that she had reached a small town about three miles distant, and there awaited his presence. It was then a little after nightfall. The King, who was just seating himself at dinner, gave a despairing sigh. There seemed to him the most studied kind of mischief in this entire proceeding. But of course her entrance into the kingdom, after so long an absence, must be greeted with due and prompt honors. As for honors military, these, at such an hour, were next to impossible. A cortege of royal coaches and a fairly copious escort the annoyed Clarimond soon caused to be prepared. But as a consequence of what she chose to consider

his mortifying rudeness, the Princess was driven to the palace in one of her most supercilious furies.

At first, during the homeward drive, she would scarcely speak to her son. Beside her sat a beautiful young girl of a very pronounced blond type, named Bianca d'Este, allied to the illustrious race who bear that name. The Princess had recently induced this young lady to become her chief companion, and with what motive it was only too plain. In one of her recent letters to Clarimond she had openly written : "I have added to my household the most charming of girls, Bianca d'Este. In lineage she is your equal, for her blood is not merely royal, but very ancient as well. I should love to see her seated at your side on the throne of Saltravia ; and it is high time you married, as you must surely admit."

Clarimond was not the man to be either coerced or counseled on matrimonial questions. He had never yet seen the woman whom he would have taken any great joy in making his wife, but he had seen at least four or five who might, even to his fastidious taste, have worn the crown of queenly consort with satisfying distinction.

As he now let his eye rest on Bianca d'Este's plump yet dignified figure and creamy, pink-and-white face, he felt no stir of interest whatever. She was undoubtedly a handsome girl, but behind such a look as hers there could not lie the intelligence which alone makes woman's beauty otherwise than a mere pastime of the senses to men, and our young king was a man who had never shown his senses very much

respect, a fact which something in the silvery gray of his eyes and in the lines of his clear-molded chin went strongly to prove. Meanwhile, as the great state-carriage rolled onward through the mellow summer darkness, and by the rays of the outside lamps which illumed it he could distinctly view this young Italian lady, he told himself, almost with weariness, that if his mother should insist and importune after that fashion of doing both in which she so notably excelled, he might yield to her and let the cherished nuptials really take place.

The Princess of Brindisi was a woman who rarely kept silent, even from sulkiness, longer than ten minutes at a time. Before the journey had been half accomplished she broke in upon a civil commonplace which her son was addressing to Bianca. So filled with bitterness were her words that Bianca's mild waxen eyelids lowered themselves as if in gentle sorrow.

The King heard, and bit his lips. "I *might* have had a larger guard of soldiers to greet you," he said, "if your coming had not been so precipitate and unexpected."

"Precipitate! Unexpected!" echoed the Princess, with the tips of her lips. "And a king speaks that way to his mother! One might fancy, Clarimond, that some member of the *petite noblesse* — no, of even the common, vulgar herd itself — lately raised to power, had presented this piteous excuse."

"I did not mean it for an excuse," came Clari-mond's cold answer. And he threw himself back

against the cushions of the carriage, disheartened, disgusted.

From this ambushade of shadow he could watch his mother, on whom the lamplight fell with an ardor somewhat cruelly telling. She had not markedly altered during the long interval which had preceded their last meeting. Her figure was still of that fine if somewhat too masculine molding which had won her, years ago, many a compliment at the court of her imperial cousin. Her face was just as firmly chiseled as of old, with its aquiline arc of nostril and its overfull eyeballs too closely set together, implying both narrowness of judgment and a voluble art of defending it. Her hands, now cased in somber traveling-gloves, just as her form was robed in a dark traveling-gown of perfect fit, retained their happy grace of gesture, not too reposeful, not too emphatic. "I kiss the most beautiful hand in Europe," a famous conqueror had once said to her, and the courtesy had echoed from court to court. But on her chill lips dwelt the old insolent curve, though a few subtle little wrinkles had crept in dainty mockery about their corners. Her hair, once abundant and dark-shining, was visibly thinned and silvered at the temples. Otherwise she continued to be the Princess of Brindisi, distinguished in every movement of her frame, an incarnate quintessence of the aristocratic idea, redolent of pride, intolerance and the most vicious aims which caste has created in spite of Christianity, and preserved in spite of all humane progress.

Her reception at the palace displeased her more

than the previous welcome had done. She had really been delayed in her journey to the frontier by an accident on one of the trains ; but this fact seemed to her no possible reason why royalty should not have immediate and sumptuous means at its command for treating her with the same homage by night as by day.

"A king," she said to her son, when at last they were alone together in a suite of chambers which even she, prepared to cavil and to damn with faint praise, could not but frankly admire for their simple yet noble splendor—"a king, my dear Clarimond, should *never* be caught without his magnificence."

"If I were in any sense a great king"—began Clarimond, with a laugh.

But the Princess stopped him, frowningly. "You're a very notable and rich one," she said ; "almost as rich as the Emperor himself."

"Well, granted."

"Almost as rich," she went on, with a bitter little laugh, "as an American."

"Oh, they're not all so rich, by any means. And you hate them as much as ever?"

"They are barbarians," announced the Princess, leaning back in her chair and beginning to fan herself.

"How we differ, you and I!"

"Oh, naturally—since you've made one of them your bosom-friend, my son, and let him tear to pieces the loveliest and most time-honored spot in Saltravia."

Clarimond gave a weary smile. "Wait until you

see the changes Eric Thaxter has wrought before you so coldly condemn them."

"I don't need to see them."

"Oh, my mother, my mother!"

"Were not those homes of our great nobles filled with the most reverend associations, legends and traditions?"

"They were frightfully ugly, and cursed by a most villainous drainage. If you could see the improvement in our health-reports since their demolition! As for their age, the hideous is ever young, since taste almost ignores its very existence, while the beautiful, being an immortal element, has existed for all time. I think you have already seen something of the palace. Surely you would not say that you prefer to it that majestic shanty in which my poor predecessor died. Eric's work has delighted more than one of the most famous architects in Paris. He is a genius, and I was lucky enough to discover him. He is an American, and for that reason you detest him."

"Deluge me with words, if you will," said the Princess; and she smiled her iciest smile. "The palace is handsome, but it smells of fresh paint, so to speak, and I am sure that when I see its white marble grandeurs I shall only repeat the verdict already conveyed to me in Italy by the most competent judges—that it does not betray a sign of genius, but is just what hundreds of clever Americans could have accomplished if given the same tremendous *carte blanche* which you gave . . . er . . . to *that person*."

"But I thought you considered all Americans bar-

barians?" the King replied, lifting his brows a little and beginning slowly to pace the spacious waxed floor of the grand apartment, with head somewhat drooped and hands clasped behind him.

"How you take one up! You should remember that I am your mother, not your courtier."

"I have no courtiers. I've dispensed with all that flummery."

"Oh, indeed! And you will soon be giving your portfolio of state, no doubt, to this American nobody."

"The American nobody, as you call him, would not accept it. He is an artist, and politics, like all ugly things, are repellent to artists."

The Princess heaved a resonant and irritated sigh. "Worse and worse," she muttered. "God has called you to be king over this land where your ancestors have ruled for nearly a thousand years," she went on, in strained, passionate falsetto. "Yet you seem to me on the verge of flinging your responsibilities to the winds—of casting your holy and anointed crown in the mud of the common highways!"

At this point Clarimond ceased from his impatient walk and paused directly in front of his mother. Flashes left his eyes that bespoke irony and yet earnestness as well. He had become quite pale, and his demeanor, always full of dignity, was never statelier than now.

"We might as well understand one another," he began, "if such a result can ever be attained between two spirits as wholly opposite as yours and mine. . . . Were it possible for me to abdicate to-morrow and



make Saltravia a republic, like Switzerland, instead of the petty, subservient monarchy that it is, I would give up my throne with the most cheerful renunciation."

"Clarimond !"

"But I know too well," he resumed, with loudening voice and a curl of the lip far more sad than spleenful, "that any such act as this would only rouse the wrath of the Emperor and plunge my poor country into untold distress. Hence I must remain the miserable parody of a king that I am — I, pierced with disgust for the paltry pretensions of all sovereigns, loving the broad, popular impulse of self-government with a love drawn from intuition, reflection, and the wisdom of the world's highest thinkers. My fate is both a piteous and a terrible one !" He grew still paler now, and for a moment covered his face with both hands, while a tremor stirred his frame, like a sudden breeze that grasps a sturdy tree. "On every side of me I discern," he pursued, "the richest chances of raising not merely this race over which I rule, but of setting to all mankind an example of liberty, fraternity, fellowship ! And yet my limbs are bound with bonds — golden, if you please, but bonds that I cannot break. If I were only less of a king I might be more of a man. If I were more of a king I might be less of a slave !"

"A slave ! Clarimond ! You do not merely shock — you horrify me !"

"Mother !" he cried, advancing toward her as she rose, "there are times when I horrify myself ! If I

were the Emperor this hour I would make Europe ring with my self-abnegations, my revolts against abhorrent creeds, my mercy and pity for those vast throngs of the crushed and despised people whom centuries of injustice have cursed ! I am one of them, heart and soul. They tell us that history repeats itself. No ; it contradicts itself ; and such a king as I — the incarnate satire on all despotisms, outrages, feudalisms of the past — is one of history's harshest contradictions ! ”

His excitement had flared up like live flame, but in an instant more it died, and he was again his calm self. The Princess, however, returned to her chair with ashen face and a staggering step. Words like these were literal blows of insult to her ; they wrought in her the same sensation as the hooting of a mob at her windows would have done, or a volley of stones flung into her carriage.

“The fault has been mine — mine ! ” she exclaimed, brokenly, as soon as any voice at all would come to her. “I — I left you among your father's people, and they have always flown in the face of order, with their horrid heresies and paganisms. For you to feel as you tell me, Clarimond, is in my sight a fearful blasphemy.” And here the Princess wrung her beautiful white hands. “But still, my son, if you think like this, you need not, for such reason, act like this. And at once — yes, at once, Clarimond — I wish to speak to you of your possible marriage. You have already seen Bianca d'Este. That she is lovely in face and form it will be foolish even to remind you ;

no one can look on her without conceding thus much. But her nature is no less winsome than her person. I have dreamed of making her your wife ; I — I will not say that I have come here with this positive purpose ; but it has held over me an undoubted sway. Such a marriage as that would work in you the most helpful and steadying changes. Oh, don't fancy that I mean for you to take Bianca as if she were a dose of medicine ! She has had men of the highest rank at her feet, and refused them ; she is captivating, as you will soon see, apart from her name, her birth, yes, even from her beauty. I mean that she is accomplished in a hundred pretty, appealing ways, which adorn her native strength of character like the enameling on silver. Still, in spirit, this dear girl is already dedicated to the church, and perhaps if you were to lay your crown before her she would sweetly yet firmly refuse it. But, ah, my Clarimond, if she should bend that golden head of hers for you to set it there, how invaluable would prove her wifelyhood ! Her queenhood, too, I should say, and you would revere in her both qualities. By degrees her influence would tranquillize in your fevered mind all these wild and fruitless longings which are the fatal pride of intellect alone. You would slowly realize that kings are the sacred vicars of God's will, and that the only safe watchword of the great, common, witless mass is 'obedience.' You would slowly realize, again, my dear son,"——

But here Clarimond ventured an interruption. He had borne much from his mother in the past ; he was prepared to bear much from her in the future,

since already it had grown clear to him that she had arrived with the intent of a permanent sojourn. But just now, notwithstanding that late effort at self-control which had resulted so successfully, the King once more felt his nerves in danger of tumult. He had never behaved to his mother with the faintest lack of respectful gallantry ; he was, indeed, incapable of any act toward her except one of gentleness and toleration, no matter how exacting or imperious might have been her own attitude. Nevertheless, he had in readiness at his mental command a certain quiet yet cogent force of repulsion which his great position made it not seldom requisite for him to employ, and which he did not hesitate to employ now.

“My dear mother,” he said, bending over her hand and touching it lightly with his lips, “you surely must be fatigued with your journey ; and if you will permit, I will send to you your women. Perhaps I have been too reckless in my recent confidences, and if so, pray remember that I have uttered them in no rôle of personal resentment. As for the young lady whom you have brought to Saltravia with the expectation of making her my wife, it would be idle in me to place the attractions of either my throne or my personality against those of her mother church. Surely she will there find profounder consolation than any that my more limited resources could bestow.”

This, even from son to mother, was a sort of royal dismissal. But the Princess, who might be got rid of for a night, could not be waived aside more durably. As one of her detested Americans might have said,

she had come to stay. The King now felt himself in straits with regard to the due reception and entertainment of Alonzo. On the following day he and Eric presented themselves at the palace, and an hour or two of the most pleasant intercourse ensued. Alonzo, after visiting with the King those great galleries on whose walls blank spaces were left for the pictures that he would probably bring to them, felt immensely drawn toward his new master. In a few more days he started on the first of his missions, one that took him among certain old monasteries in the north of Italy. Meanwhile the King bored himself with etiquette and precedent under the keen scrutiny of his mother. The Princess would not lift an eyelid unless court custom sanctioned it. She managed, during that summer and the next autumn, to gather about herself a little *côterie* of supporters, and for a time a new political party was talked of. But her son's entire indifference may have gone far to prevent such imprudent measures.

"My mother has tortured us for eight weeks," Clarimond at length said to Eric. "I wonder how much longer she will insist upon making it a crime for a man to be seen smoking a cigarette within twenty yards of her, even *en pleine air*."

"What is the punishment for such a crime?" asked Eric, who had thus far been simply repelled by the Princess, never presuming to cross the threshold of any chamber in which she chose to enshrine her august presence.

. "Decapitation, I believe," said the King, tragi-

comically. "My dear Eric," he went on, "is not everything quite spoiled?"

"We had thought of a sham révolution, Lonz and I," began Eric. And then he described, in terse and swift phrase, an imaginary fête, where the court would play parts of masquerading martyrs and suppliants, and the palace would be stormed by supposititious insurgents."

"Delightful," said Clarimond. "What 'a lark,' to speak your American slang. We would give sanguinary orders to the *maître d'hôtel*. Plenty of blood, and heads on pikes thrust in at the windows. Everybody would be mock-terrified until supper-time, and then it would all end in amicable beakers. Did your beloved Alonzo suggest that? No, I need not ask, Eric. It is too distinctly you."

"It is he, not I," replied Eric, fibbing shamelessly. "When you know him better, you will accredit him with the originality of the idea."

"I know him well enough," said the King, "to accredit him with much inventiveness. But my mother" —

"Ah, yes, your majesty, I" —

"Tut, tut, Eric. If you 'majesty' me, I will exile you from Saltravia."

"Pardon, monsieur; it was a slip."

"Don't let the slip occur again. . . . But the Princess would never consent to such a fête. It would satirize too fiercely her well-known prejudices. . . . 'Lonz,' as you call him, will soon be back with some treasures?" . . .

Alonzo returned within the week, and greatly pleased his new employer by one or two shrewd selections in the way of purchase. But when October had waned, and the Princess had given every sign that she did not choose to re-seek her dear Italy, Clarimond declared himself piteously handicapped. Bianca d'Este was forever thrust at him, and the young lady's 'accomplishments' were made as drearily ordinary to him as the details of his toast and coffee at breakfast time. He could discover in Bianca nothing that interested him. The winter began, and the court had become, under the Princess' haughty surveillance, one somber monotony. Winter in Saltravia was never severe; snow fell, and blasts blew, but seldom with harsh result. Alonzo, thoroughly fitted to his new position, acquitted himself with skill and tact. He made several new journeys, and each bore its fine artistic fruit. The King became almost as devotedly his friend as he was the friend of Eric. When a fresh spring had lavished its green beauty on the Saltravian hills, Eric declared to his fellow-lodger:

"I am positively jealous of you, my dear Lonz. Jealousy, you know, is the touchstone of friendship. You leave me no resource with the King except that of slander. I must whisper insidious things about you in the ear of Clarimond."

"As if you could, Eric!" said Alonzo.

"Oh, I'm quite capable of it, I assure you," said Eric. "I'll get the Princess to poison you. Still, no, on second thought, I can't. She's entirely too strong

a hater of our transatlantic republic. If I talked with her about that Borgian Burgundy for *you*, she would be certain to snub me for wishing to give you so old-world and aristocratic an extinction."

The Princess, though much more prosaic than a Borgia, had already contrived to make her son's little court a nest of discontentments. Her severities, her arraigning edicts, had bathed in gloom all the merry abandon of Clarimond's environment, and by the time that May touched the valley with its tender promises, she had filled it also with feuds and bickerings. It was her wish that the hotels adjacent to the springs should be closed permanently, but on this point the King showed firm disfavor. "The waters are wonderfully healing," he said. "Let those who choose come and drink of them."

"Bah," said his mother. "My dear Clarimond, you cheapen your charming little kingdom. And then those unspeakable Americans!"

"Unspeakable indeed," said the King, "in occasional instances."

"What do you mean?" asked the Princess, with a start.

"I mean the enchanting young American lady of whom I caught a glimpse last evening," he replied. "I've not yet found out her name, but Eric has promised to get it for me. Perhaps Lispenard might know her, but, as you are probably aware, he is now in Munich."

The Princess gnawed her nether lip and said nothing. Her son's civilities to Bianca d'Este had not



been half as accentuated, of late, as she desired them to be.

The name of this "enchanting young American lady," in whom the King found himself uncommonly interested, was Kathleen Kennaird. On the morrow Eric Thaxter made that discovery, and at once imparted it to Clarimond. For some reason Eric refrained from mentioning the former relations between Kathleen and his absent friend. All the time, however, he was telling himself that it was a very small world, and wondering if Alonzo would not agree with him to this effect when he returned from Munich.

"I should like greatly to know that girl," the King said to Eric a day or two later. "Her face somehow haunts me. Do what you can about it, won't you?"

If Mrs. Kennaird had heard those words from the royal lips it is certain that her heart would have given a very lofty leap indeed.

## VIII.

THE truth was that Kathleen's mother had brought her to Saltravia with a most ambitious motive. After leaving Stuttgart they had been living for several months in Dresden, and there she had heard things concerning Clarimond which made it seem at least conceivable that a splendid event might crown past disappointments and chagrins. Poor Kathleen, whose health had somewhat failed of late, did not dream of the audacity which underlay her mother's proposal that they should visit the Saltravian springs. They had hardly been three days at the hotel when Clarimond, strolling one evening, just at sunset, past the casino, saw Kathleen, and was struck by her peculiar loveliness. The Princess detested his democratic way of exhibiting himself, as she called it, and more than once implored him not to appear thus publicly. But the King had no idea of hedging himself with his own divinity; he had long ago formed the habit of going and coming like a private gentleman, and though the stares of the crowd did not precisely please him, they were less of a bore than would have been compulsory self-immurement. Mrs. Kennaird was quickly plunged into an ecstasy by his evident admiration of Kathleen.

"I do so wish one could know him," she said to her

daughter. "Did you notice how he looked at you, my dear?"

"No," said Kathleen. "It seemed to me that he looked at everybody equally, and in the most amiable manner."

"They say," continued Mrs. Kennaird, that he *is* wonderfully amiable for a king. And he certainly is very handsome; don't you think so?"

"I think him very distinguished." . . . Kathleen's eyes glistened as she added: "There's a picturesqueness about him that corresponds perfectly with this lovely land he rules. He interests me very greatly. I don't mean so much because of his royalty as of the artistic atmosphere in which he seems to dwell; though one must allow each its attractive force."

"His being royal is hardly an objection, I should say," remarked Mrs. Kennaird. "One can endure it. At least *I* can—that is, in a son-in-law." And she laughed a sort of tinkling little laugh.

"Mamma! Good Heavens! What are you saying?" As she spoke, Kathleen flushed to her temples and then grew colorless.

They had left the casino and had reached a somewhat lonely spot, where, at a distance, you could see the pale marvels of the palace towering with its innumerable spires, turrets and crenellations above the bounteous verdure of the dark-green champaign. Between masses of spicy-scented hemlocks flashed and plashed a cascade, and so strong was the afternoon breeze that it blew little spray-laden gusts from the foamy and tumbling turbulence of water. Mother

and child were now wholly alone, as it chanced, and Mrs. Kennaird, with a look to right and left as though an ambushed listener were possible, if not just a likelihood, suddenly said :

“I’m not dealing in such fairy dreams, my dear, after all.” And then she let her hand rest on the girl’s arm, steadily and meaningly pressing it.

“Mamma! mamma! Even if I cared to marry *any one*, I”——

“You shall not sacrifice your life to that ruffian, Kathleen! For this is what he has been to us both! I shall never be happy until I see you married happily—and brilliantly, too. Of course King Clarimond would be a glorious triumph for you. I’ve dared to dream of such an event. Yes, Kathleen, I actually have! And there are strong reasons, my dear, why I should so have dreamed. You remember that Mrs. Winslow in Dresden—that bright little Boston woman with the lemon-colored eyebrows—who gave us our letter to the Jerninghams here? Well, it was she who first roused in me my daring idea. She looked at you, on the evening that we dined with her, and murmured to me that you had the air of a queen, because your manner was at once so grand and so simple, and then (this she said in the frankest yet most abrupt fashion, as if it were only an after-thought) because you were so entirely, so exceptionally handsome. Before that the voluble little creature had been speaking of the King of Saltravia. She had told me that his hatred of morganatic marriages had given offense to some of the haughtiest

nobles in Europe, and that he had refused to receive a certain princely cousin of his on account of having contracted such an alliance. Then she said other things concerning Clarimond; she spoke of his intense democracy, of his rumored assertion that he meant to marry the woman he loved even though she were born a peasant; and lastly, of his well-known regard for America and the American people. . . . This, my dear, was the secret of my having brought you here. You see, I'm making a clean breast of it to you now. Don't stare at me in that amazed manner. You act as if you'd just heard an explosion of dynamite."

"I have, mamma—and a rather loud one."

Mrs. Kennaird drew herself up and gave several short nods. "Kathleen, stranger things have happened. And if there's a woman living who could bring about such a development I believe that I am she."

They had reached a small rustic seat, within a thicket of laurels whence rose a bust in granite of Poushkin, the famed Russian poet. Kathleen sank into the seat almost exhaustedly, heaving a quick, sudden sigh, while her mother stood beside her, a presence of extreme stateliness and distinction.

"Are you tired, my dear, so soon?" she asked.

Kathleen looked up at her with a cold, fatigued smile. "You've wearied me beyond expression," she answered.

"My child!"

"Oh, mamma, it's true! You know that I loved

him, and that I love him still ! To you it may sound senseless enough, but he is more to me than a whole dynasty of kings ! And then for you to torment me by this new folly ! As if you had not already made me go through enough ! As if I were not the butt and jeer of hundreds of people at this very hour ! Surely you might have some mercy after what you dragged me through in London ! ”

“Kathleen . . Kathleen ! This is atrocious ! ”

“It is, indeed ! ” cried the girl ; and without another word she sprang to her feet and hurried away, leaving her mother to gaze at her figure as it retreated among the fringing frondage of the hemlocks.

Well though she believed that she knew Kathleen, Mrs. Kennaird had not a doubt that the actual success of her new and most characteristic design would win from her child the gladdest sort of acquiescence. There are some natures that can no more conceive of others really refusing certain positive worldly gains when the chance comes for palpably grasping them than a man born color-blind can conceive of the lights and shades in a canvas by Rousseau or Daubigny. If it was fated that this extraordinary, this unprecedented young King should fall in love with her daughter, his nuptial path would of course be one strewn with roses. As if any woman could or would refuse to become a queen ! Kathleen was capable of odd behavior, beyond a doubt ; but even her worst vagaries must end at the bounds of lunacy.

That afternoon the Kennairds had received an invitation to go and drink tea at the Jerninghams' villa,

They had not yet met the Jerninghams, though brother and sister had both left cards upon herself and Kathleen a few days ago, finding them absent from the hotel. When Mrs. Kennaird again saw her daughter, she refused to pay the proposed visit.

"Say that I am unwell, mamma," was Kathleen's announcement. "Say anything you please. I shall not go."

"But you must, my dear. They are not people to treat rudely, although I *have* learned, since we have been at the hotel, that they are exclusively in the foreign set, and that neither the King nor any of his court honor their entertainments. It seems that Mr. Jerningham has made himself very unpopular in Saltravia. He has quarreled with the King's favorite friend, the architect who built for him that superb marble palace—a person named Mr. Eric Thaxter, an American, and"—

"Eric Thaxter?" broke in Kathleen. "I remember that name, Where have I heard it?"

"Really, I don't know, my dear; perhaps during your London days. He can't be any one of the least importance in New York, though I am told that he originally belonged there. He is of great importance here, however; he is a sort of power behind the throne. The King is devoted to him. I *must* manage to meet him. Poor, dear, gouty old Mrs. Madison has promised to present him soon. One sees him now and then at the casino, she tells me, and not seldom in the company of the King himself. He has the *entrée* into the very most difficult Saltravian houses.

Indeed, why not, since that charming Clarimond deigns to be his friend? . . . You *will* change your mind about the Jerninghams, my dear, will you not?"

"No," replied Kathleen, with much firmness. Then she looked at her mother very fixedly, and pursued: "Now, mamma, let one thing be clearly understood between you and me. I do not wish to go at all into society while we are in Saltravia. We came here for the waters—at least *I* did, if you did not. It is late in the day for me to try and impress upon you that my social life has ended. You must have seen that in Dresden. And as for a certain idea of yours, I can only say that it would be painful to me beyond words—painful and mortifying in the extreme—were it not so strongly flavored with an element of wild absurdity."

Mrs. Kennaird attempted no further persuasions. "Let me achieve her presentation to the King," she mused, "and this nonsensical desire for secluding herself will vanish like one of the Saltravian morning-mists." And while she robed her stately figure, that afternoon, in the most becoming gown that her limited wardrobe possessed, the new yearning cheered her spirit as an elixir-like cordial warms the blood. Because an aim was dazzling, even dizzying, should it for that reason be deserted? Ah, to think of the exquisite victory it would mean! How that horrible Marchioness of Dendudlow would writhe when she heard of it! To be the mother of a queen! There was something splendidly distinctive in the very bold-



ness of the project. The fact that an effort like this teemed with novelty and daring was no sign that it would prove a failure. After all, so much depended on Kathleen's powers of fascination, and these were immense. Then, too, was she not just American enough to be called an American girl, and was not this the next remarkable and stirring act for the American girl to commit? Margaretta Kennaird surveyed herself in the dressing-mirror as she donned her bonnet, and thought how the matronly symmetries of her figure would grace a court. And then to have her portrait painted by some famous European artist and hung in the palace as that of the "Queen's mother!" Perhaps several centuries after her death it would hang there. And for several centuries, no doubt, they would recollect her great accomplishment overseas in New York, whence her stock had sprung. Everybody who could claim the faintest relationship with her would do so. "Queen Kathleen" would rate for them as an ancestress worth having; that humiliating Dendudlow affair would be mercifully hidden (why not?) by the capacious mantle of history itself. "Queen Kathleen!" What a delightful sound it has! "Clarimond and Kathleen!" There was not as much real honeyed romanticism in even "Romeo and Juliet"!

It must be confessed that meditations of this kind produced an intoxicating effect upon this most curious of American "aristocrats." Her state of mind was almost an agitated one by the time that a short stroll had brought her to the gates of Jerningham

villa. She felt herself on the verge of society here in Saltravia, felt that to-day might prove but the quiet threshold of many beatific morrows! There were not more than twenty guests present, and these were nearly all her own countryfolk. In the course of a little time she was presented to at least half of them, finding that she already knew a few, that she had heard of a number more, and that certain others were not by any means of a desirable type. Then it entered her shrewd mind that this set into which she had drifted was altogether the wrong set, and that if she kept Kathleen quite out of it she would be doing a most prudent act.

The Jerninghams, brother and sister, had evidently a great grudge against the King and his court, and it was pleasant for them to feel that their friends were of the same rather rancorous mind. They never spoke against Clarimond, but they hinted that he was flippant and frivolous and had all the proverbial bad faith of princes. Brother and sister were oddly alike, both being tall and slim, both having a sunken look about the cheeks, and slaty-hued eyes with pink-edged lids. They both talked with a slight lisp, and in talking, used their hands with the same jerky little gestures. Neither of them often said "I"; it was nearly always "we" with them, so that after a while you got the impression that nothing happened singly to this devoted brother and sister, but that human experience treated them to its good and its ill in perpetual duo, as the rain and sun treat two apples on a single stem.

Harriet Jerningham made herself notably civil to Mrs. Kennaird, and after a while they had a private chat together amid the general babble of the little modish drawing-room.

"We hear your daughter is so wonderfully beautiful, Mrs. Kennaird," said the sister of the deposed art superintendent. "Pardon me, but we *do*! And it grieves us greatly to hear that she is indisposed to-day. The waters sometimes affect people for a few days just like that. *We* can't *live* away from them now, though at first we thought them really quite horrid. That is why my dear brother hasn't departed from Saltravia. I mean since Mr. Eric Thaxter caused the King to treat him so cruelly. But perhaps you haven't heard about that. No? Oh, then, I won't bore you with our private grievances. And yet, after all, they've become piteously public ever since my dear brother was ousted from his position and that Alonzo Lispenard was made to replace him."

"Alonzo Lispenard!" broke from Mrs. Kennaird. "Is—is *he* in Saltravia?"

"I believe he's in Munich now, though there's a report that he will be back next week for the great royal ball at the palace. Pray, do you know him?"

"Yes . . . yes, I've met him. He's a . . . a New Yorker, you know."

"True, I suppose you've met him in society over there."

"Yes," said Mrs. Kennaird, feeling a little dizzy and hardly knowing just what answer left her lips. "Quite right. It . . . er . . . *was* in society, as you

say. . . . And so this Alonzo Lispenard," she presently faltered, "holds a position here under the King."

"Oh, yes; Art Superintendent, you know. Eric Thaxter, the adored friend of Clarimond, took it away from us—that is, I mean from my *brother*—and gave it (with the King's full sanction) to this Mr. Lispenard."

"I see . . . I see."

"Pray, *is* it true," continued Miss Jerningham, "that he was engaged to a beautiful girl in New York who jilted him the moment she heard he'd lost all his money?"

"Really, I think it's quite false," murmured Mrs. Kennaird. . . . She got away from the villa as soon as decent politeness would permit. The late afternoon made the statued lawns in front of the hotel look like squares and medallions of dark-green plush. From an immense Japanese pagoda that burned with as many tints as if it had been builded out of a fallen rainbow, floated music by one of the most perfect orchestras in Europe. Kathleen, in a plain, dove-colored gown, without a single ornament of any kind, moved here and there amid the arabesque of box-edged paths, holding a book against one side of her bosom, as women are wont to do. She seemed wholly unaware of the attention, even the scrutiny, which she attracted, though she was perhaps perfectly well aware of it and preferred to appear otherwise. She had known no one at the hotel, on her arrival, and afterward had desired complete isolation. The new acquaintanceships into

which her mother had drifted were not shared by her; she remained calmly though not haughtily aloof.

When Mrs. Kennaird now drew near the great square over which loomed the light and pretty façade of the chief hotel, she at once perceived that Kathleen was being a great deal noticed and silently admired. "Little wonder, too," it swept through her mind; "for, as she walks there now her form and face seem to embody this delightful thing of Chopin's that his Majesty's musicians are playing so finely." And then Mrs. Kennaird approached her daughter. But before she could reach her side, old Mrs. Madison, with wrinkled face, gouty step, and a cane big enough for a British squire beset by the same malady as herself, came hobblingly forward.

"My dear Mrs. Kennaird! I don't know how I can stay any longer in Saltravia unless you present me to your daughter! It isn't only that four or five young men are always tormenting me for a presentation to her, knowing that I know you. It's that lots of tiresome old persons like myself, of whichever sex, make my life a burden with their longings." Here Mrs. Madison shook her head, and so briskly that the gold-rimmed glasses trembled on her high, clear, curving nose. "Ah, Mrs. Kennaird, it's we old things that are the wisest lapidaries for pronouncing on the color and water of that dearest of all diamonds, youth!"

"My daughter will be charmed to meet you, and your friends, also, my dear Mrs. Madison, *of course*," was the reply given by Kathleen's mother. But

while she stood and strove to talk blandly with this old alienated Knickerbocker (for who could forget that the Madisons were leading people in the palmy days of the Van Leriuses, and that a Madison once married a Van Leri, as far back as 1796 ?) she was secretly throbbing with discomfort and chagrin.

Alonzo Lisenard here in Saltravia ! And not only that, but on terms of special favor with the King ! It was ruin of all those delicious hopes ! For the very moment that he heard Clarimond had admired Kathleen, what would he be sure to do ? Prejudice his royal friend, beyond a doubt, against both herself and her child. Oh, it was too aggravating, too maddening ! . . .

When she reached Kathleen, Mrs. Kennaird grasped the girl's wrist with a tremor and force that instantly betrayed her trouble.

"My dear Kathleen," she began, "I have such wretched news !"

"Wretched news, mamma ?"

"Yes. Don't stare at me. Everybody, I hear, is staring at *you*. There, . . I won't clutch you in that idiotic style any more. You . . you *know*, my dear, that I—I have always prided myself on my *repose*."

"Well, mamma ?"

"Let's walk along quietly toward the hotel, as if nothing had happened. I've just heard from Mrs. Madison that your wonderful beauty and grace have set everybody talking about you."

"And is that all that has happened?" Kathleen asked, with a decided languor.

"No. I only wish it were! . . . My dear child, where did you think Alonzo Lispernard had gone after . . . after the breaking of your engagement? Don't look demoralized, now! Answer me!"

Kathleen had visibly started, and her change of color was manifest.

"Gone?" she repeated. "I heard that he was here in Europe. You remember, mamma. Something was said about an Austrian Grand Duke having wanted him to purchase works of art for his private gallery. . . . But I never believed the report. It was never confirmed. I"——

"Kathleen! *Believe* the report now, if you choose!"

"Believe it, mamma!"

"Yes. But change the Austrian Grand Duke to a . . . Saltravian King."

Kathleen looked fixedly at her mother for several seconds as they moved still nearer to the steps of the hotel. When she spoke it was clearly to show that she had in a measure understood.

"Alonzo is here?" she faltered. "You mean that?"

"He lives here, and lives under the very wing, so to speak, of Clarimond. It seems that his friend, Eric Thaxter, sent for him to come on here after the failure." Then Mrs. Kennaird gave a few further explanations which ended by the time they reached the huge inclosed balcony of the hotel and ascended

its steps. Kathleen sank into a chair, not trembling, but looking as if tremors might at any moment begin.

"We must go away from here, mamma," she presently said, glancing up into her mother's face, while that lady stood in placid grandeur beside her. "We must go at once."

"Oh, now, my dear Kathleen! You surely won't be so foolish" —

"He will think we came solely on his account."

"But I tell you he isn't here."

"Still, he may return any hour. No, mamma; I will not stay. Let us go to Vallambrosa to-morrow. We intended going there, you know, when you suddenly got this craze for Saltravia."

Mrs. Kennaird tightened her lips together, stared straight ahead, and gave not a syllable of response. Oh, of course, Kathleen must have her own way! It would be folly to keep her here against her will, for that will had modes of making itself felt which coercion sooner or later failed to profit by. . . . And to think that the presence of this detestable Alonzo should shatter such a lordly edifice of shining and prismatic dream! Ah, it was too harrowing! In a certain sense Kathleen was right; the horrid creature *might* think she had come here because of him, though any thrills of dignity on the subject would have been wholly idle if it were not that this bugbear was actually an intimate of the King. In that abominated capacity he was fate-appointed, as one might say, to head herself and her daughter off. . . . Scalding tears of ire and disappointment gathered to the



eyes of Kathleen's mother while she stood and watched the spacious hotel-grounds, dotted with strollers and sweeping on toward the palace, white and splendid against its dark-green mountain-side. She had raised her handkerchief to brush away these fiery tears, if in reality they should show signs of falling, when a kind of flurry among the people on the lawns made her curious to learn its cause. This soon became plain, as she discerned a group at some distance away, headed by a man of noble and gracious presence. She had seen Clarimond a day or two ago, on the occasion when Kathleen had so evidently won his heed, and, once having seen, it was not easy to forget him. She now leaned down and murmured to Kathleen :

"The King, my dear. And I think he is coming this way."

"Let us go upstairs, mamma," said Kathleen, rising. "Or will you remain here, and shall I——?"

The words died on her lips, for just then Mrs. Madison came puffing up the steps, with a young gentleman of striking appearance at her side. "Mrs. Kennaird," called the old lady, "I couldn't stand the pressure of circumstance any longer. I'm compelled to beg of you that you'll make me acquainted with your lovely daughter, so that I can appease the longings of Mr. Eric Thaxter, who is resolved to know her or die."

"Mr. Thaxter certainly shall not die without knowing Kathleen," said Mrs. Kennaird, in her most dulcet tones. And then there was an exchange of

introductions, gone through quietly and quickly, as most well-bred persons manage to deal with such matters.

Kathleen, who was one of those women made even more interestingly beautiful by weariness and pain, at once found herself liking Eric Thaxter. It had all come back to her that he had been "Lonz's foreign friend," and for this reason he was now clad with a peculiar enticement. While Mrs. Madison bowed over her cane and held converse with Mrs. Kennaird, the girl, low-voiced, and spurred by a desperate sort of frankness, addressed Eric.

"I've just heard, Mr. Thaxter," she said, "that Mr. Lisenard lives here, and with you."

"Yes," replied Eric, "but at present"——

"He is in Munich. I've heard that, too. The whole piece of intelligence has given me great annoyance. I take for granted that he has told you of . . . of our broken engagement."

"Yes, Miss Kennaird, he did tell me."

Prepared though she somehow was for this candid reply, its gentle delivery sent the rose-tints flying into her face. Her eyes moistly sparkled as she fixed them on Eric's. "Oh, I'm so sorry that mamma and I should have come here!" she exclaimed, though with a softness of tone that defeated her mother's thirsting ear. "We never dreamed that *he* was here! I think nobody in New York except, perhaps, his sister, Mrs. Van Santvoord, really knew just where he had gone." Then she drooped her gaze for an instant, and while she did so her observer had, as he

himself might have phrased it, artistically explained her. "The face for a Psyche," passed through his mind, "and all the more entrancing because nature has gifted her with that divinest of charms—the incessant forgetfulness that she is so beautiful. She doesn't think in the least about the divinity of her profile. Self-consciousness, the curse of most feminine beauty, has mercifully spared her. A woman like that, who treats herself as if she were a spinster of sixty, with defective front teeth and a hairy mole on her chin, becomes an unconscious goddess. I don't wonder Lonz adores her still, and I don't wonder Clarimond is aching to know her."

But aloud Eric said, with his native affable bluntness: "My dear Miss Kennaird, it's not a very mighty planet, after all. Don't bore yourself about Alonzo's proximity. When he knows that you've honored Saltravia with your presence, he will probably be quite too ashamed of his past misconduct to let you get the faintest glimpse of him. Oh, I know just how atrociously he behaved. He's told me, and I've scolded him without pity."

Kathleen bit her lip, and watched the speaker for an instant with searching and wistful eyes.

"He's . . . told you?" she breathed. "But if you don't think me to blame *at all*, Mr. Thaxter, he—he must have given you a very generous version of the whole affair." Then she drew herself up, and with almost a lofty calmness went on: "But we are going to-morrow. We have decided to push on toward Vallambrosa. No doubt you know it. They say it is

delightful and also very quiet there. Retirement is what I most care for just now."

"Retirement?" echoed Eric, with a mock gesture of despair. "And here I am, Miss Kennaird, come to you as an envoy from the King, who greatly desires the pleasure of your acquaintance."

Perhaps Eric had, without intention, loudened his voice a little. Anyway, Mrs. Kennaird heard all that he had just said; and considering the fact that Mrs. Madison had a minute ago uttered certain tidings of a most exhilarant sort to her, she was now suddenly transported once more with hopeful surprise.

"My dear," she said to Kathleen, as the latter drew backward several steps, with a distinct show of reluctance, even deprecation, "I trust that if Mr. Thaxter wishes to present you to the King you will not hesitate to accompany him!"

But here Eric shook his head and broke into a light laugh.

"Miss Kennaird need not accompany me, by any means," he said. "If you will merely walk with her down toward this little fountain where the bronze Tritons are, I will bring the King to *her*."

Mrs. Kennaird caught her daughter by the wrist. She was excessively agitated, and showed it, to the great secret amusement of Eric.

"Do you hear, my love?" she almost stammered. "The—the King is to be brought to *you*!"

Half descending the steps which he had lately mounted, and removing his hat as he did so, Eric

answered in tones of courtesy as tranquil as they were careless:

"Oh, I assure you, King Clarimond never permits a lady to be presented to *him*. He's very royal, if you please, in other ways, but that is not one of them."

Pale, and inwardly quivering, Mrs. Kennaird still held her daughter's wrist. As Eric passed down to the lawns, her voice, with brisk, staccato whisper, shot into Kathleen's ear. It conveyed but four words, yet these were pregnant with an intensity of desire and demand:

*"Come! . . . Come, at once!"*

## IX.

KATHLEEN obeyed. After the ladies had left the balcony, Eric again joined them. "If you will kindly wait just there by the fountain," he said, pointing toward a charming aquatic design in bronze, whose spirts of water had caught the slant sun-rays and turned to liquid gold, "I will at once cause you and monsieur to meet. . . . And remember, please, we will call him 'monsieur'; he prefers it."

"And I am to speak with him in French?" asked Kathleen, somewhat nervously.

"If you wish. I suppose you do not speak Saltravian?"

"Heavens, no!" she exclaimed, still more nervously, and not noting the dry twinkle in Eric's eyes.

"The King will probably address you, then, in French. But if you prefer English he will accommodate you. It is one of the great self-delusions of his reign that he speaks English at all reputably."

Here Mrs. Kennaird broke in, with her blithest laugh: "Oh, my dear child speaks French very prettily." And as Eric departed with a bow, she turned to Mrs. Madison, who had just rejoined her, and said, in a voice made purposely loud enough for him to hear:

"What a delightful man this Mr. Thaxter is! No wonder the King likes him so!"

Clarimond, who did everything with grace, soon had himself presented to Kathleen and her mother, precisely as if he were some ordinary friend of Eric's with whom the latter had chanced to be moving about among the paths.

"And it all went off so easily!" Mrs. Kennaird remarked afterward. "Before we knew it, Kathleen, he had shaken hands with both of us, and had asked you if you didn't want to go with him and see the carp fed in the great marble basin of the *grandes eaux*."

Kathleen and the King walked side by side, it is true, but they only paused for a moment to watch the carp dine, afterward passing on to where the terraces of the palace dropped grandly down to an artificial lake, and a hundred windows blazed like huge diamonds or rubies where the westering sun smote them. Above, on the long marble balustrades, two or three peacocks were perched, one pure white as the sculptured stone itself; and below, half way between the lily-pads and the rustic landings, floated a few stately swans.

Somewhere behind one of those radiant windows the Princess of Brindisi sat, and near her was Bianca d'Este. It was quite probable that the King knew he risked maternal observation during his present saunter with the young American lady whom he had sought to know. Since the arrival of his mother he had not presumed thus publicly to associate himself with any new foreign acquaintance. If Kathleen had been a man, her disrelish might have had its limits. At

present, there in her palatial ambushade, with her cherished Bianca to share the humiliation, whether real or fancied, this disrelish became a boundless disgust. . . .

"It pleases me greatly, mademoiselle," the King was meanwhile saying, in his flexible and almost native French, "that you should so care for Saltravia after so brief a stay here."

"How can one help caring for it?" returned Kathleen, as they paused on one of the velvet-swarded terraces. Looking sideways, across her shoulder, she perceived that the same group which had accompanied the King before they met were following him now, at a distance respectful and discreet. She perceived, too, that her mother and Mrs. Madison were also not far behind them. This was possibly what her companion wished. It struck her that he was a gentleman, this comely and fascinating monarch, who wished many things most decisively, and who had the art of making his desires operative with the same cool ease that belongs to the touching of an electric bell and the summoning of a needed lackey.

"The weather here," she continued, "is always so enchanting." And then she looked into Clarimond's face with one of those smiles that his dislike of commonplace women had even thus quickly caused him to feel was the harbinger of something at least quickened by piquancy. "I am already sure, monsieur," she added, "that *la pluie et le beau temps* are subjects whom you control at pleasure. You keep the first amiably exiled, and you allow the last, like one of



your ancestors' court-jesters, to do all the genial things that it pleases."

Clarimond laughed. "No, mademoiselle," he replied, "you overrate my powers of dominion. I'm more sensible than that far-away English king who commanded the sea to obey him, or that Persian one who whipped it with rods."

For the first time Kathleen looked full into his face. Let it be forgiven her when recorded that the curious complexity which we call a woman's heart throbbed strangely. No woman was ever really the lover of two men at the same time; but many a woman has believed that she could have loved (and passionately, devotedly) some man whom she has known while still loving the object of her first allegiance. Perhaps it was this way with Kathleen; perhaps the fact of Clarimond's great rank wrought with her more than she would have wished to tell. Women are shaped from self-contradictions, not because they are in the main weaker than men (it will some day be scientifically disclosed, no doubt, that they are strong where men are weak, and weak where men are strong), but because millions of years have lapsed in which they have served as slaves to the alleged lords of creation. Yet is this, after all, a true philosophic view of things, and is not a stern wrong done to Kathleen when we assert of her that she felt one whit more disarrayed than a like environment would have rendered one of the other sex, this nearness of sovereignty being feminine, not masculine? Few men, if history does not err, have resisted the blandishments of

queens. And Clarimond, if he dealt in no blandishments, bore himself at all times with that magnetic demeanor which would have made his greatness quite secondary in the eyes of not a few women on whom he might have chosen benignly to beam.

Lightly he now pursued, with his gaze fixed upon Kathleen's face in a way that somehow belied the levity of his words: "Oh, yes, the weather here is my only rebel and my only traitor. I've an idea about it; I've decided that it is only endurable when we don't think of discussing it. Am I not right, and do we not respect it most when, like Cæsar's wife, it is above suspicion?"

Laughing, enjoying the pleasantry, Kathleen threw back her head. Now for the first time had she a moment of real, vivid social distraction.

"I resent this rebellion, monsieur," she said, "on the part of your Saltravian weather. Still, as yet, I've no personal grudge against it. When a rainy day comes I shall ask you to give me some parliamentary edict, that I may read it to the insurgent elements, signed with your royal seal."

"Have you as much faith in my power as that, mademoiselle?" he asked, drawing closer to her. "I assure you I am a very small sort of king."

"You're the first that I've ever met," she answered, gathering boldness. "If they are all like you, monsieur, I shouldn't be afraid to meet any of them — not even the Tsar of Russia."

"Russia?" he said, his sunny face clouding a little. "Do you care for that country?"

"It's . . . romantic to us who do not know it. It's so far away, monsieur, and so" —

"Barbarous," he supplied, a little harshly. "Yes, being the most uncivilized of European countries, Russia is hence the most romantic. Her very patronymics, with their bristling thickets of consonants; seem like lairs for the imps of assassination; and one need only hear the words 'Moscow' and 'Odessa' and 'Volga' to feel as if one had been assisting at a conspiracy of Nihilists."

He ended these words almost sternly, but at once his face lightened and his voice grew kind.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle," he pursued. "I try to be without rancors. Usually I succeed in showing none. Of all times this is the last when I should remember them. Shall I tell you why?"

"If you wish, monsieur."

"Then my reason is this: that I read in your face, in your manner — will you pardon me for saying so? — the evidence of a sorrow which does not consort with your unquestionable youth, and — will you still pardon me? — with your very extraordinary beauty."

"A sorrow?" faltered Kathleen, drooping her eyes. . . . Then, in another minute she lifted her gaze and said firmly: "You are right, monsieur. I *have* a sorrow — a great sorrow."

For what seemed to Kathleen a strangely long time there was silence between herself and the King. She waited for him to speak, and at last he did so, in a voice full of somber repressions.

"If it were a sorrow that I could lighten, or in any

way appease, mademoiselle, I would so gladly do my best to help you !”

Once more their eyes met, and Kathleen’s lips trembled.

“You — you are *so* good !” She hesitated. Then a flood of memory swept over her, and she continued : “We only came here, mamma and I, for a short visit. We are going to-morrow . . . Yes, to-morrow. We are going to” —

“Going ?” shot in Clarimond, with an intonation that was at once flattery and reproach.

“Yes, monsieur ; to Vallambrosa.”

“To-morrow !” He gave an impatient frown, and tossed his head. Then, as if with a desire to control undue overplus of ardor, he went on : “May I not induce you to change your mind, mademoiselle ? May I not induce you ?” And for an instant he touched her wrist with his hand.

Kathleen shook her head. “Ah, monsieur,” she murmured, “you will be good, and not try to persuade us !”

“Us ?” he echoed. “Ah — your mother ! I had forgotten her. And you, mademoiselle ? You are bent on leaving Saltravia ?” His face had flushed, and his gray eyes had kindled. “You must stay for a little while yet. You *must* stay !”

Kathleen smiled. “Is that a royal command ?” she asked. “They tell me I must not remind you that you are a king ; and yet” —

“Ah,” he cried softly, “I will remind you, mademoiselle, that I am not only a king but a tyrant !”

“Monsieur ?”

"Yes, yes ; I mean it !" And he threw his walking-stick into the air with a grand show of semi-genial vehemence. "I tell you that I will not have it. Now you have reminded me that I am a king, you shall feel my power. I will defy your country—America, is it not ?"

"Yes, and no. America and England both together, monsieur ; for I was born " —

"Enough." And he waved his walking-stick once again. "*Allons*. I will defy America and England both. Luckily Saltravia is an inland kingdom, and they can't come with iron-clads to get you until" . . . He paused, and looked intently at her, smiling, and yet with a sudden dubious gleam in his lucid eyes.

"Until ?" said Kathleen, secretly excited, with a lovely rose at full bloom in either cheek.

"Until I have opened the ball with you at the palace next Thursday. It's against precedent ; it will shock certain people ; it will immensely shock my mother, the Princess of Brindisi. But I vow to you that I shall not dance the first quadrille, that all the duchesses and arch-duchesses and princesses must do without me, provided you refuse this little request of mine. . . . Now, will you refuse, or will you be kind and consent ?"

She saw that he was greatly excited. She realized that unwittingly she had captivated him, a young man of about her own age, and full as was she herself with the power to love, even to worship. She could not, as a woman, fail to understand the tremendous

honor that he paid her. For a moment she forgot Alonzo. This man was a king, and, for a time, she forgot the man whom she loved better than throngs of kings.

"Will you consent?" he persisted; and she scanned his face, thinking how noble he looked, how every inch royal.

"Yes, monsieur," she answered, knowing well the exultant delight of her mother on learning of this brilliant honor, no matter what might be the stern disapprobation of the court.

Just then her mother's voice broke upon her ear. She started, half because the sound was not further away, and half because it jarred so on her new pleased mood.

"My dear Kathleen," her mother began.

But it was too late. Eric, slipping away from two or three ladies with whom he had been at odds in some gay argument, darted forward; but he also found that it was too late.

"Lonz," he said, catching his friend by the arm.

Alonzo, who had arrived from Munich a day or two earlier than he had himself expected to come, pressed forward, seeing the King and never dreaming of whom else he was destined to see. He had secured two or three really superb pictures in the Bavarian capital, and was anxious to tell Clarimond of his *trouvailles*. As he reached the King's presence, however, he abruptly perceived the truth, and recoiled, growing pale.

Clarimond noticed nothing, however. Kathleen

thoroughly controlled herself, as did her mother. In a way they were both prepared for the meeting.

"My friend!" said the King, extending to Alonzo his hand; "you have returned sooner than I expected." Then there was a pause, after which Clarimond, with all his accustomed graciousness, continued:

"Let me present you, Lispenard, to these ladies, who are, I believe, your countrywomen" —

And at that point Alonzo quite lost his head. . . . It seemed to himself, afterward, that while hurrying away he must have fallen there on the terrace before the palace if Eric's arm had not strongly thrust itself within his own, and perhaps, too, if Eric's voice had not harshly burst upon his singing brain.

"Lonz! Lonz!" this voice called to him, "you're disgracing yourself before the King."

"I can't help it. Let me get away."

"Lonz! . . . Oh, very well. We're both getting away, it strikes me, as fast as we're able. . . . Look here, now, Lonz, if I'd known you were coming" —

"Yes, Eric, I understand. Come right on. When we're at home we can talk it over."

At home they did talk it over. When Alonzo had heard everything, and when his mood was thoroughly calmer, he said, with a kind of dogged dullness, to Eric:

"I suppose it's all up with me. I might as well send in my resignation at once."

"Nonsense," replied Eric.

"What I did, you know, was a great breach of etiquette.

"The King isn't a slave to etiquette."

"Still, I rushed off at scandalous haste. What *would* you do? Write him a letter and confess everything?"

"Yes," Eric said, after a reflective pause. "That's precisely what I would do, my dear friend. And if you want him to sympathize with you, be as untruthful as you can manage."

"What *do* you mean, Eric?"

"Don't let the full facts transpire. Don't tell Clarimond how badly you behaved to that poor girl."

"Ah, you will have it that I behaved badly!" said Alonzo, as he quitted the room to write his proposed letter.

It was now almost dark, and dinner would be served at eight. Alonzo lighted the studio and then seated himself at his writing-desk. The words were slow in coming; he felt the excessive awkwardness of this placating epistle, and yet did he not owe it to Clarimond, his master, his benefactor, his protector? Would not silence in him be churlish at such a time as this?

Suddenly a certain thought crossed his mind, and he rose, flinging his pen aside. In one corner of the room stood his easel, draped. He drew back its covering and looked at the canvas thus revealed. It was the picture of Kathleen.

Just before leaving for Munich he had given the portrait what he felt were his absolutely final touches.



He had not known then how good it was—how definitely and vitally the witching head bloomed forth from shadow. Yes, Eric had been right. His powers were of the slow and brooding sort; they were like those of the poet who must “beat his music out” in travail of self-distrust. But here was plainly a masterpiece, nevertheless. And yet, as he watched this perfect portraiture of a woman whom he still hungrily loved, though she was lost to him forever, a sense of the terrible irony of such a picture pierced him to the soul. The very excellence of its art would be an incessant jeer. Why had he not foreseen this? An abrupt desire to ruin the picture now swept down upon him, oddly blended with the egotism of the creator, an element always potent in every true artist’s mind. He actually seized his palette-knife, and stood undecided as to whether he should rip the work into tatters or spare it for future hours of mingled happiness and grief.

While he thus hesitated, a knock sounded at the studio door. “Come in,” he said, startled, casting the palette-knife on the floor, and turning to meet, as he supposed, Eric Thaxter.

But it was not Eric. To his very great consternation, it was the King.

Clarimond seemed repose itself. “You must pardon me,” he said, “for intruding upon you like this. No doubt I bore you horribly. I do not? That is pleasant to hear. Pray let me take this chair; and you . . . will you have the kindness to sit near me? . . . That is right. I wanted to stretch

out my hand to you and clasp it for a moment — like that. You see, I am certain you are very unhappy, and when my friends are unhappy I am always full of sympathy for them.”

The King’s hand was pressing his own while Alonzo, with drooped eyes, miserably murmured :

“Oh, monsieur, I have behaved with immense vulgarity !”

“Vulgarity !” said Clarimond, in a musing voice, which had the effect of giving his listener a chance to escape from the toils of embarrassment, just as the young sovereign’s marvelous tact had no doubt suggested to him that it would do. “Vulgarity,” he went on, “is the intimate ally of passion. And passion is naturalness. We can’t always keep the landscapes of our lives full of clipped shrubs, like an Elizabethan garden. Tell me, now, *mon ami*, were you not once engaged to marry this Mademoiselle Kennaird ?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“So I gathered, from the tumultuous things that her mother said after you left. Mademoiselle scarcely spoke at all. Her mother had an extraordinary amount to say.”

“And against myself, of course, monsieur !”

The King stared, for a moment, down at the carven agate of his cane-handle. “Well,” he at length said, smiling, “she was not merciful to you. But I did not believe her. And it struck me that mademoiselle did not believe her either. You will think me a sad busybody”——

"You, monsieur!"

"But I should be glad to hear your version of the affair. Shall I tell you why?" He spoke with marked eagerness, and yet the instant that his eyes fairly met those of Alonzo he averted his look and went on in a queerly altered voice: "It is because the young lady, Mademoiselle Kathleen (is not that her name?), has greatly interested me. After a few seconds he repeated the words, "greatly interested me. . . . Yes," he soon continued, "if you would tell me just what occurred I should feel most grateful for your confidence."

"Permit me, then, to tell you, monsieur," said Alonzo; and he at once began a recital in which he adhered to the strictest truth with what might be called a very carnival of conscientiousness. Remembering Eric's harsh judgment of his conduct, he allowed this to cast upon his disclosures a self-accusative gloom. Ending, he said: "I fear that I exacted too much. I am conscious of this now, monsieur, though I once thought myself sternly wronged."

The King rose. "It all seems to me the fault of that very dominating person, the young lady's mother," he said. "You are generous to rid Mademoiselle Kathleen of all blame as you do. But it is like you." He stretched out his hand, which Alonzo sprang forward to grasp with both his own. "I have known for some time that you had a large, humane heart. I did not need Eric to tell me that."

"Eric will rarely see my faults, monsieur," faltered Alonzo.

The King now turned his eyes toward the picture on the easel. "Ah, you have been painting something," he said, in the voice of one who speaks from a desire to break an irksome pause. Then he gave a great start, and hurried toward the portrait.

"It is she!" he exclaimed. Receding a few steps, he threw both hands upward with a gesture of extreme enthusiasm. "Wonderful!" he pursued. "Not merely as a portrait, I mean, but as a work of art. It reminds me of the Monna Lisa in the Louvre. It has the same fine security of treatment, the same rich subtlety of color."

"Monsieur is very kind."

"Kind? No, no!" the King replied, almost irritably. He turned toward Alonzo and surveyed him for a moment with an odd, restless, enkindled glance. "Good God!" he hurried on, gnawing his lips, "how I envy you for being able to paint like that—to paint *her* like that!"

There was now a dead silence. Alonzo, with wholly new emotions, watched him while he gave the picture a fresh impetus of survey.

"You can name your price for this!" he suddenly said, turning and facing his companion once more. "I want it. I want it very much."

"I did not wish to dispose of it, monsieur."

"Not wish to dispose of it?" shot the quick and caustic response. "But, man, I will pay you a fortune for it! Come, now. Whatever you please to ask shall be yours by to-morrow morning!"

And then the eyes of these two men very meaningly

met. Clarimond read in the other's gaze a refusal cold and obdurate—and perhaps he read there the cause of this refusal as well.

However it may have been, an abrupt change took place in him. "You spoke of vulgarity not long ago," he said, visibly disarrayed, and walking toward the door of the studio. "It is I who am vulgar now. Pardon me." And at once he hastened from the apartment.

With his eyes fixed on the portrait, Alonzo sank into a chair. "The King loves her!" left his lips in a flurried whisper. He closed his eyes, clenched his hands, and a surge of ungovernably jealous feeling seemed to flood his soul.

## X.

CLARIMOND, with scarcely more than a nod and a hand-clasp to Eric, who waited below, sprang into the carriage which had brought him from the palace and returned there at once. He chose to dine alone in his own suite of chambers, and at dinner drank a little more wine than usual. Afterward he went into his mother's apartments, where she was receiving a very select assemblage that chiefly consisted of the highest Saltravian nobility. Having saluted his mother, he moved about the rooms for some time, and at length paused quite a while before Bianca d'Este, who was looking exceedingly handsome in a gown of blue satin embroidered with silver.

"The Princess almost gave up expecting you," she said, looking at him very earnestly with her sweet, infantile, china-blue eyes.

"Am I so late?" said Clarimond.

"Not that, monsieur; but we feared — or, I *should* say, her Highness feared — that other attractions would detain you."

He saw the sly innuendo, but chose to pretend that it escaped him.

"Really, I do not understand," he said. "Other attractions?"

Bianca flushed at her own boldness. And yet the courage of desperation possessed her soul. That soul

was no longer in bondage to the Church. A new religion had enthralled it. Women have rarely found it difficult to love kings, and Clarimond, if he had had no royalty for a background, would have appealed to almost any woman's heart. As it was, he fired both the heart and imagination of Bianca d'Este. In spirit she was at his feet, with that sort of genuflexion which is tinctured by a tang of intoxicated recklessness. And yet her mien (ice over flame) was calm enough as she now replied :

"I mean the handsome young American girl, monsieur, whom you honored so greatly this afternoon."

"You saw me?" Clarimond rather lightly said. "And you think I honored her? It seemed to me as if honors were easy, as one says in English whist."

"Oh, monsieur!" Bianca cried; and while she looked into his face, which of late had grown to her more than kingly — had grown to her, indeed, almost like the face of a god — she ardently persisted: "For *you* to speak like that! For *you* to even hint that a mere nobody should not be honored, and very greatly honored, by the least smile from you!"

He watched her for a moment as though she half irritated, half shocked him. "I am a man," he then said, with great simplicity and gentleness. "How can I be more, and why should I not dislike hearing it suggested that I am more?"

"You are a king," replied Bianca. "You are a king, with a long ancestry of kings behind you!"

He laughed softly, and shrugged his shoulders, glancing about him at the walls of the festal room in

which they stood, with its panelings of white-and-gold, with its huge clusters of wax-lights for side-chandeliers beaming above other huge clusters of prisms like stalactites, and with its ceiling where cupids drove in chariots drawn by butterflies through gorges and over causeways of rosy and azure cloud.

"It means very little to be a king nowadays," he said. "At least, it means very little to me."

"I am so sorry!" she answered. "I am so intensely sorry!"

"You have been talking with my mother," he replied. "It is easy to see that you are full of her views and prejudices."

"No, they are mine," she averred. "Call them what you please. I—I hate so to address you as 'Monsieur,' but this is your command, and what can one do but obey it? You are royal, and 'Majesty' is your rightful form of address. And then the way in which you despise and flout all ceremonial! Oh, this is harder to bear still! You should have entered here, just as you should walk abroad, with your equeries, your gentlemen-in-waiting. Ah, it is terrible, terrible! It saddens me, it wounds me, to see you cast aside the rights and dignities of your great birth. I do not wonder that your mother sorrows. It is not mere pride that makes her feel as she does. It is a sense—oh, pardon me, for I speak from the very inmost depths of my heart!—a sense of your having been appointed by Heaven itself to rule over your people, and of your treating this holy mission as though it concerned some slight and paltry office!"



As Bianca d'Este ended, the King took her hand in his own for a moment. He felt that it was trembling, and he saw that there were tears in her bright, wide, childish eyes.

"You are very sincere," he said, with a smile that was not exempt from a certain delicate melancholy. "A great many people, since history began, have been quite wrong and yet excessively sincere." He paused, still holding her hand, and it flew about the great room like wild-fire that he was paying this public courtesy to the Italian girl whom his mother so avidly desired him to marry. "Perhaps, my dear Bianca d'Este," he presently resumed, with a faint, enigmatic smile loitering at the corners of his lips, "you are right, practically, after all, and I, practically, am in error. The whole affair of conservatism against liberalism grows harder to manage, I imagine, every new day of my reign. Well, I thank you for your lecture, *Altissima*." And with his odd smile fading a little yet not wholly dying, he dropped Bianca's hand and passed from her presence.

He had detested the idea of his entertainment to-night. Its limitations in the way of asking only certain guests disgusted him; like all the receptions given by his mother since her appearance in his realm, it positively reeked with what he held to be the worst creeds of caste. There were present several nobles, on this particular occasion, who had only deigned to come, as Clarimond well knew, at the eager solicitation of the Princess. They were mostly men past middle age, and their young King had hor-

rified them by his liberalisms. They held his person sacred, and were inflexible in their fealty to him, never forgetting that their ancestors, through centuries back, had fought and died in the service of his. But they abhorred his modernity of ideas, and had suffered keen pangs at the audacious changes wrought in their land. Political no less than social and physical, these changes had affected them with mingled melancholy and horror. Two or three of them had chosen to hide their chagrin amid the gayeties of Paris, where their great wealth and princely Saltravian birth had secured welcomes for them among the most exclusive sets. One of these latter, a man of about forty years old, with black, flashing eyes, olive skin and a little curly beard and mustache, held an exceptional position as cousin twice removed from the King. His fortune was very large, and he passed most of his year in the French capital, whence he had but lately returned. He had been, for a long time past, one of the bitterest of the malcontents; he was irascible, and notoriously haughty to all inferiors. While the King had made his first tour through the ball-room every eye had sought his own and every head had bowed. But it had struck him, however vaguely, that this particular nobleman had bowed with a certain distinct stiffness. As Clarimond now drew near his mother, he fixed his eyes full on the handsome, swarthy face at her side, and said with an accent of quiet good humor:

"Ah, Philibert, so you're back once again!" At the same moment he put forth his hand.

Prince Philibert advanced, and taking the King's hand in his own, with a reverent droop of the head, firmly, even resonantly, kissed it.

A smile of proud pleasure swept over the face of the Princess Brindisi. This was the immemorial usage of the Saltravian court—for a peer or peeress, on returning after an absence, and being addressed by the King, to give his hand an obeisant kiss.

But Clarimond, meanwhile, grew white with anger. He had long ago forbidden all such forms of self-humiliation on the part of his courtiers. Prince Philibert well knew this fact, and what he had just done flavored of the most overt defiance.

The crystal-gray eyes of the King met the dark and brilliant ones of his subject. "Prince," he said, with some curtness, "I supposed you were aware that I dislike and indeed have vetoed all this flourish on the part of my friends."

Philibert, while he stood moveless as a statue, with both hands behind him, and while he looked, in his evening dress decorated by several orders that betokened his great rank, a figure of striking distinction, answered composedly and gravely :

"Pardon me, *your Majesty*, but I only fulfilled a usage that is many centuries old."

This answer, in the circumstances, bristled with clear revolt. The King started, and looked at his mother, who gently inclined her head, as if in complete approval of the words just uttered.

Taking a few quick steps toward the Princess, and passing Philibert's unstirred figure, Clarimond leaned

his lips close to the lady's cheek, and shot out one low, determined sentence :

"You have gone too far, madam — too far, as you will perceive !"

In another moment he turned and spoke to Philibert.

"You are insolent," he said, "and most meaningly so."

The Prince gave a slight shudder, and seemed about to respond.

"Not a word !" commanded the King, and his voice, though loud, was wholly calm. "I dismiss you from the palace. Do not presume to enter it again, on pain of exile."

Philibert stood as if irresolute, and then, growing almost ghastly, stammered forth in reply :

"If I wore a sword, as my forefathers did, I would break it and drop the fragments at your Majesty's feet."

With glittering eyes, the King curled his lip. "Better if you thought less about deporting yourself like the pet tenor in a French grand opera, monsieur, and put your heroics into a more wholesome form. There are throngs of hungry beings in Saltravia that need the forty thousand francs I am told you flung away in a single night, last month, at a Parisian gaming-table."

These words, pronounced with a bell-like clearness, penetrated far. The guests who heard them rapidly whispered them to others who had not heard. A dead silence followed, while the ladies huddled to-

gether in alarm, and the gentlemen (mostly all quite ready to throw themselves between Philibert and the King if any treasonable act were attempted by this noble of such renowned bad temper) gathered nearer to the scene of dispute.

In Prince Philibert (who would instantly have decided to challenge any equal and almost any inferior who should thus have assailed him) this reproach from his King produced only a sort of grief-stricken dismay. He clasped both hands together like a terrified woman, and then, with a look of infinite reproach from his splendid dusky eyes, hurried almost reelingly away.

Clarimond at once called out to the assemblage, in tones vibrant, high-pitched, yet full of extreme dignity :

“Ladies and gentlemen, I ask your pardon for what has occurred, and beg that you will all do me the kindness of leaving me alone with my mother, the Princess, to whom I must speak a few private words.”

He stood, as he spoke, at the side of the chair into which his mother had sunk. He was the picture of perfect self-control, and though paler than any one present had ever before seen him, the kingliness of his bearing had never been more finely manifest.

In a little hubbub of murmurs the entire throng pushed toward the doors. To the King's ears came nothing articulate, and yet the excited hum might in part have been translated by phrases like these, falling with sibilant tumult from friends, lukewarm friends, partial foes, and foes inactive though malign :

"A fine king, on my life!"

"To insult a great nobleman for merely paying him the proper court!"

"He rebuked him quite justly!"

"He's a horrible gamester!"

"As if a king should talk like a schoolmaster!"

"So he *should* spend some of his millions in charity!"

"What does the King spend? Come, now!"

"They're always *calling* him so generous."

"He gives thousands and thousands to the poor every year."

"He's enormously rich."

"Well, he more than halves his income."

"Oh, bah!"

"Did you ever *hear* of any one who sought him for help going away empty-handed?"

"And he spends hours each week visiting the poor."

"Anyway, Philibert deserved just what he got."

"The Emperor may take this up."

"I hope he will. Philibert's his friend."

"The Emperor can do nothing."

"Oh, absurd!"

"Preposterous!"

"I should say it was! That a king as noble and good as ours should be browbeaten in his own palace!"

And thus the talk buzzed on, finally dying into complete silence. The doors had closed behind the last retreating figure. Not even a servant remained. The Princess was still seated. Her son stood before

her, looking down into her face. And his own face was far sterner than she had ever before seen it.

"At last I can speak," he said, measuredly breaking the silence, "and tell you what long ago you should have heard from me."

"And that is?" she queried, with an intonation of hauteur, though secretly not a little alarmed.

"It is this: your reign has now ceased, and mine, if you please, must begin."

"Your reign, Clarimond? If only you *would* reign"—

"Oh, I shall; never fear." And he lifted one hand with a telling gesture that seemed to add, "Wait and see." . . . "But I shall reign, be sure of it, in my way, not yours."

"My son! As if I had sought to interfere with your rulership!"

"You have sought in every way to interfere with it. Yes, of late even politically; but now all such folly is at an end. I have been far too lenient with you; I shall show you henceforward how in playing with fire one sometimes may singe one's fingers."

"Clarimond! Have you forgotten that I am your mother?"

"No, I remember it too well; otherwise I would have you past my frontier inside the next two hours."

"Ah," wailed the Princess, equally swayed by rage and fright, "it is too plain that you *have* forgotten!"

"No; but it was you that for many years forgot I am your son. When the chances of a throne overshadowed me then you remembered my existence."

“You — you insult me !”

“I have no wish to do so, but believe me, I have both the wish and the intention of restraining you. Since you came into my territory, weeks ago, nothing but discord has resulted. In a hundred minor ways you have opposed me. My dislikes have been set at naught; my detractors have been encouraged; my allies and supporters have been treated with contempt. Appointing yourself royal *châtelaine* of the palace without my permission, you have invested that dignity with continuous if covert revolt. . . . I need define myself no futher; I owe you no explanation of your own deplorable conduct. From this time forward you are under the strictest surveillance. Every act of yours will be watched.”

“You . . . you threaten me !”

“I do not threaten, I warn you. There will be no threats. The instant that you show the least rebellious spirit, the least desire to set your own tastes, convictions, formulas of deportment against my own, that instant the carriage will be waiting — a state coach, with outriders and all the royal paraphernalia that you so love — to convey you outside of my domain.”

“Such treatment !” burst from the Princess. “It is inhuman.”

“It is deserved. You thought to continue this amazing policy of making my little land an abode for disrespect to its sovereign. The silly insubordination of Philibert to-night is merely an effect of your many imprudent and ill-advised counsels. For a long time



you have been trespassing with strange boldness upon my royal prerogative. You have now reached the limit of your unhappy imprudence. Your further residence in Saltravia depends upon your complete courtesy to me, and your complete recognition of my place at the head of my own government. More than this, it depends upon your acceptance of my so-termed democracy. Still more, it depends upon your graciousness toward my friends — and in particular toward my dear and honored American friend, Eric Thaxter, concerning whom you have spread idle and hurtful reports, and on whom you have endeavored to cast odium by excluding him from entertainments which you have daringly given, as may be said, with the full apparent sanction of the Crown.”

All these words of Clarimond’s were spoken with a simple repose which finely became him. His manner, his voice, never once lost that serenity and equipoise without which he would have seemed less commandant than accusative. He seemed both to the lady who now rose half-tottering to her feet, and said, in accents choked with passion :

“I—I had best go at once, then. You exile me, as you threatened to exile poor Philibert !”

“You exile yourself, if so you prefer,” replied the King. There was a bell-rope within a few yards of him, and he moved toward it. With hand lifted, as if in the act of summoning a servant, he went on : “I await your orders. If you refuse to accept my terms, declare so, and you shall be at once conducted to the frontier.”

The Princess, grown wan as ashes, clenched her lips together and stood for several seconds with an irresolute look. At length she waved her hand, and murmured, in the tones of one from whom concession is wrung by bitter throes :

“I—I do not refuse. I will, at least, remain for the state ball on Thursday. I—I have announced my intention of doing so, and whatever your tyranny, I prefer that you should not appear before your subjects in the light of a monarch who has made his own mother a fugitive from his realm.”

Clarimond smiled very coldly. “If you had chosen to dwell here in peace you would have had slight cause to complain of ‘tyranny.’ As it is, your continued sojourn is one of sufferance alone.”

“Sufferance !” gasped the Princess.

“Precisely. You came here with two motives. The first was to pit yourself against faiths and principles of mine which are a part of my very life. The second was to try and force me into a marriage of the merest loveless convention. The weapons you have used in either case were the same that dealt my dead father the keenest grief, and perhaps drove him prematurely to his grave. Yours, madam, is a stormy and truculent spirit. I inherit nothing of it, but possibly I inherit from you alone the strength of will which too long has clothed itself in forbearance. That strength of will you shall now have a chance to test. As I said, you will be watched. Being the lady highest of rank in my kingdom, I will accord you the right of receiving my guests on Thursday,

But if the least sign of discourtesy is shown by you toward any guest who crosses the threshold of my palace, on the morrow you shall be conducted where the turbulence and rebellion of your disposition may boil and ferment to the discomfort of others rather than my own. . . . There, now, I think it is all quite plain between us."

"Quite plain!" muttered the Princess. "Yes, I see—I see. You wish to crowd your rooms with vulgarians."

"You need not gaze upon those vulgarians unless you so desire. Certainly a number of people whom you will rate as vulgarians will present themselves. Among these will be a young lady (an American—or an Anglo-American, I might more truly call her) with whom I shall open the ball. Her name is Kathleen Kennaird, and I shall dance the first quadrille with her. She is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen—the most beautiful I should ever expect to see, though I should live two lives instead of one. But were she a hunchback negress, fresh from Africa in her beads and war-paint, it need matter nothing either to you or those assembled. I am master; I am King. For my actions I account to no one save myself."

He passed, with an air of unwonted but very distinct pride, down along the waxed floor of the spacious saloon. But she who had heard him with one or two convulsive shudders, now gave a kind of wrathful spring, both hands hanging clenched at her sides.

"You will account to your Emperor," she called,

"You are not so great as you vaunt yourself, Clarimond of Saltravia! You—you are just mad enough to marry this creature. I recall now that one of your cousins—the King of Saxony's own nephew, too—disgraced himself by a low marriage. No doubt it is in your blood to do such horrible things. But I will prevent this." The Princess' face glistened with little beads of sweat, and her eyes were blazing. "I will go to the Emperor at once. I will"—

She recoiled, for Clarimond hurried back toward where she had stood, half cowering in her frenzy. It seemed to the Princess that perhaps he might actually mean her some personal violence, though if her mind had proved less clouded by anger and dismay she would have realized that from one of his usually gentle spirit such a course, in any circumstances, would have been unthinkable.

All that the King meant to do was to seize the bell-rope which a brief while ago he had desisted from seizing. But now, reaching the spot where it hung, he gave it a strong pull, and almost immediately two footmen, in the royal livery, answered his summons.

"You *shall* go at once to the Emperor," he said, in a low and very tranquil voice. "I will give these men orders for carriages, and will see that a special train is prepared for you the instant you reach"—

"No, no," broke hoarsely from the Princess. "Send them away! I—I did not mean what I said." In a trice she had grown piteously humble. "I—I was more than half in joke, my dear Clarimond." And a

little pathetic jet of laughter broke from her lips, like an effete spirt from a ruined fountain.

The King looked at her with great steadiness for a second or two. "As you wish," he then said, and gave a sign of dismissal to the two servants, who promptly vanished.

The Princess had, indeed, pulled in sail. Her son had seemed to her, during the few past minutes, like a rock against which she would only waste her strength in vain. Besides, she was immeasurably proud of his kingship, and would have suffered untold regret if the Emperor had presumed to attempt his deposition. It was all quite clear to her mind in this brief interval: she *had* gone too far. She might have known that the lion in him would suddenly turn on her like this. He would keep the very letter of his menace, too, unless her entire tactics were changed forthwith. Revolting in their democracy though she held his views to be, hereafter she must conform to them, or leave these lovely Saltravian hills. And surely she was quartered here in a most magnificent way. Her two or three Italian palaces were nothing to this, in which so lordly a suite of chambers had been allowed her. And then this enchanting valley, so radiantly improved, in spite of her grumblings to the contrary. And the waters, too; she had no idea of the wondrous good they would do her rheumatism. . . . It might all get stupid in the winter, but the winter was still a good distance off. Time enough to slip off to Rome or Naples again by the end of November. And

then there was Bianca d'Este. The girl's love for her son was now almost a madness. For that most seemly of unions there was yet a hope. Yes, a hope—why not? "School yourself," darted through the Princess' mind, "to a self-effacement, difficult yet not impossible. In the end he may yield, and marry her. Then your turn will come in real earnest, for if once there is a queen, if once there are little princes and princesses, he will grow more conservative. Men always do. That possible horror of his marrying the American girl (God knows there's nothing rash he would *not* do, just now) must be met with subtlety, since high-handed measures have become mere blows in the air."

Even roughly to put in words the lightning-like reflections of Clarimond's mother makes them seem deliberative, not intuitive, as they surely were. When she again confronted her son, after the departure of the footmen, it was to show, both in speech and mien, a meekness and complaisance that she had never remotely hinted until now.

"Henceforth you shall have no further cause for complaint," she said. "I will abet you in all your plans and purposes. Try me, and you shall not be disappointed. I admit myself thoroughly vanquished. Your will is my law."

She bowed her head, and Clarimond, who knew her better than she knew herself, smelt deceit as if it were some odor that suddenly had freighted the air. At the same time his native generosity and fair-mindedness made him hope this abrupt conversion meant

more than its first blush would imply. "Agreed, then," he said, with a reserve that expressed patience and sadness interblent. "But pray bear in mind one matter: If the Emperor should have the presumption (which I greatly doubt) to concern himself in any of my personal affairs, however important or however trivial, I should as promptly resent such meddling as though it were the work of an officious subject. Though my answer should cost me my scepter, slight a one as it is, be assured that I should not hesitate to make it, and make it firmly. I am not so enamored of reigning that the Emperor's frowns or smiles can appeal to me as such mighty forces of my own destiny, nor shall you ever find me in the mood to regard him as if he were a schoolmaster with a birchen rod. . . . And now," he proceeded, "I shall ask you kindly to send me the list of those whom you have already invited to the state ball. Such a course on your part will enable me to avoid errors which might otherwise occur, since I wish to make out a list of my own, and desire that it should not clash with yours."

"It shall be sent you to-night," was the reply; "or to-morrow, if you prefer."

"To-morrow will be quite early enough," answered Clarimond; and with a bow he quitted the great, bright-lit, vacant apartment, ending an interview which was least agreeable of the many which he had held with his mother, and which had perhaps caused him more secret pain than any which he at all had held since his accession to the Saltravian throne.

## XI.

THE court was already furnished with rich material for busiest gossip ; but a few more morrows were destined to cast in shade even so pregnant a topic as Clarimond's cogent reprimand of Prince Philibert. The King had been seen publicly strolling through his own grounds with Kathleen ; he now as publicly visited her at the hotel, spending hours each day in the pretty sitting-room which Mrs. Kennaird at once secured for his own and her daughter's comfort, as downstairs they would almost have been mobbed by gaping foreigners. The mental condition of Mrs. Kennaird, at this particular time, was one of hysteria narrowly verging upon dementia. The King's open admiration of her child filled her with a feeling toward him which might have given her, if she could have looked upon herself just as she now was, and looked from normal eyes, many shivers of shame. She had impulses to fling herself on her knees before Clarimond and press her lips to his hand, telling him that he was the most godlike being the world had ever seen, and that his goodness in giving heed to Kathleen roused her deathless maternal gratitude.

The American snob, who is apt to be the most mettlesome and affirmative of all snobs yet recorded, had risen rampant in Kathleen's mother. She could not sleep ; she could scarcely eat a morsel, and then did



not know of what food she partook. At first she had had ideas of sending to Paris for a robe in which to array her child at the state ball. Then, after this plan had been vetoed by Kathleen, she grew reconciled to the idea that the girl might create a more striking effect if clad with the utmost simplicity. After all, let her be attired in the plainest of white frocks. What other beauty in all Saltravia could stand so trying a test?

"Yes, it *is* wiser," she said excitedly to Kathleen. (Of late she had done and said everything excitedly, yet with her effort to appear self-repressed hardly better concealed than that of the fugitive ostrich.) "My dear, you are quite right. People will look at you more, and in so doing they will see you as you really are. Besides, it's in far nicer taste."

"Oh," said Kathleen, shrugging her shoulders, "I should like a handsome gown: what girl in the circumstances wouldn't? But to telegraph to Worth or Félix, and to send either of them money we could so ill afford! Why, the very thought of it is pure nonsense, mamma, as you must be aware."

"I wasn't thinking of the expense," replied Mrs. Kennaird, with a little irrepressible catching of the breath. "There are certain things one *always* can afford."

Kathleen laughed, and shrugged her shoulders. "You mean, I suppose, that we could go back to Dresden and economize more severely than we've yet done."

“Oh, no ; I didn’t mean that ; I — I didn’t mean that *in the least*,” said her mother.

Kathleen gave no answer, divining what had really been meant. If her mother only knew the actual substance of her late conversations with the King ! They had principally talked of her past engagement to Alonzo Lispenard. She had been very frank ; she had told Clarimond everything, and had found in him a most gracious and friendly listener. He had asked her many questions, to all of which she had replied with thorough candor. As regarded the impression that she had made upon him, she could not doubt that it had been one of strong fascination. This in itself was nothing new ; most men, under a certain age, had shown her but one sort of homage. To have a king show it was entirely novel, and not a little dizzying. Moreover, such a king as he, filled to his finger-tips with all the graces that please women, handsome, courtly, amusing ; in countless ways the choicest of male companions !

For three afternoons he dropped in upon her, and each time her mother received him in her blandest fashion, contriving soon to slip from the apartment and leave them together. Mrs. Kennaird had no fear of the faintest imprudence on Kathleen’s part. If she had thought at all on this subject it would have been to decide that her daughter’s American blood would save her from even a dream of folly. Besides, had she not already learned that Clarimond was the most honorable man in his own kingdom ! Let people chatter, as they undoubtedly were chattering. Among

the hotel-residents it was jealousy, pure and simple. What chiefly concerned this very agitated lady was the question of how Alonzo had thus far acted, and of how at any moment he might take it into his head to act. Here he was, returned to Saltravia, the bosom-friend of the King's bosom-friend. He must have heard that Clarimond was intensely captivated with Kathleen. Everybody was talking of the affair. Stories had got afloat that the Princess of Brindisi had already pleaded by letter for the intervention of the Emperor.

"You are so reticent, my dear," she said to Kathleen, one evening, at the end of the King's third visit. "You never will tell me what he says to you about Alonzo. Does he not mention him?"

"Rarely, mamma, and then always with kindness."

"Kindness. M — yes." . . . Mrs. Kennaird pursed her lips a little. "They're still . . . friends, then?"

"Friends? Oh, yes."

"I suppose Alonzo hasn't dared to say a word against you, Kathleen. Otherwise he'd certainly have relieved himself of untold spleen, my dear."

"He never carried grudges," the girl said, as if her own thought was her sole auditor.

"Well, even if he didn't! Heaven knows he had a monopoly of most other faults!" At this particular time any praise of Alonzo was for some reason specially nauseous to Mrs. Kennaird. "As for keeping silent about us to the King, why, there isn't the least doubt that he'll do so. How would he dare do other-

wise, now that Clarimond has become your actual slave."

"Mamma! mamma!" exclaimed Kathleen. "You will make me *so* ridiculous if any one by chance overhears you in these moods!"

"Moods?" bristled her mother. "What moods? I'm *excessively* reticent! You *are* so droll at times, Kathleen! As if any mother could bear more calmly than I do the splendid, the unparalleled honor which overhangs you!"

Kathleen looked fixedly at the speaker, with her eyes moistening a little and her underlip trembling. "I—I wish you would not speak like this," she faltered. "It distresses me so!" . . .

Her mother continued, however, — stating that she had not the vaguest doubt Clarimond would soon startle his court more keenly than he had dreamed of startling it before; that Kathleen had only to wait a little while longer and the stars would drop rich and shining in her lap; that all past annoyance, mortification, defeat, was to end gloriously in unique triumph.

Kathleen listened, and then slipped, as soon as she could, into the privacy of her own chamber. The King had said that he would re-visit her to-day. There was only an hour yet before the time of his coming. She did not want to see him again, and yet she did want to see him again. What was it? Did it mean that he might bring her certain tidings of Alonzo. Did it mean this? . . . did it *really* mean this? Or was she infected with the fervor of

her mother's overleaping ambition? Her mother! The sense of that personality, that companionship, so tremendous in its influence, its domination, terrified her. She looked into her own brain, as it were, and found there nothing but a depressing tumult. How would she act if action should indeed be required of her? No, no; the need of such action would not, could not come. He, a king! It was fatuity to dream of what her mother had so boldly prophesied. Her hands were at intervals very tremulous while she dealt with her toilet; and once or twice she felt as if she must desist from it and seek the one sort of aid that just then would have been least to her taste.

But when the King came she received him with much composure. Her mother was to-day in visible throes. To Kathleen her disarray was pathetic. The perturbed lady gave one or two spasmodic curtsies, which were a mournful travesty of her usual serene equipoise. She was so drunk with the heady wine furnished by the fact of this fourth royal visit that exhilaration made her almost stagger. Clarimond, calm and gentlemanlike as usual, appeared to notice nothing. "Perhaps," thought Kathleen, "he is used to such groveling servility. Poor mamma! will she ever get out of the room with a decent grace? She who has prided herself for years on doing nothing awkwardly!"

But at last the door closed on Mrs. Kennaird's ducking and cringing figure. As this happened, Kathleen breathed an audible sigh of relief. The

sigh ended in a feverish laugh, and she said, with sudden candor, to her guest :

"It's dreadful how you've demoralized my mother. You must see, so I mention it."

"Demoralized her ? I ?"

"Oh, then you don't see, monsieur. Mamma isn't accustomed to kings ; that is all."

"And are you ?" he said, with his sweet, kind smile. They were now seated opposite one another, and near a large window that gave one a fine view of the mountains and a still finer view of his white, many-turreted palace.

"No," she answered. "But mamma—oh, you *must* have noticed ! You're a royalty, as they call it, and you've turned her head. It's odd, too, for she has met all sorts of great people—prime-ministers, dukes, even the English Prince himself. . . . I seem so vulgar when I talk like this ! I do hope you'll excuse me. No doubt you're used to embarrassing people,—especially Americans."

He shook his head, smiling. "I have always thought it rather hard to embarrass Americans," he replied. "One in particular," he added. And then his smile deepened, as he watched her with a glance full of drollery, both frank and sly

"If you mean me, monsieur," she returned, with a slight shrug, "I am somehow proof against all surprises. It's very scandalous, no doubt, to acknowledge as much at my age."

"Scandalous ?" he said, with swiftly changing manner. "What a name to call honesty by !"

"Oh, I am not so honest, I assure you."

"There you confessed that you are. Any one else would have spoken so differently."

"Any other — woman, you mean?"

"Well, yes," he assented.

"All other women, when they talk with you, monsieur, are anxious to convince you of their honesty?"

"Well, yes."

Kathleen seemed to muse a little, slowly shaking her head. "That is because you are *you*."

He made an impatient gesture. "Is it so conducive to feminine deception, then, this being *I*, as you put it?" And without waiting for her to respond, he went on: "What made me in the first place like you so much, mademoiselle, was your charitable forgetfulness of who I really am."

"I didn't forget it in the least, however. I cultivated myself into seeming as if I did."

"Ah, you're bent on disappointing me!"

"No, monsieur; only on telling you the truth."

"The truth from people never disappoints me."

"Are you so sure?" she murmured, a little vaguely, not meeting his look.

He gave a slight start. "Not quite sure, not quite sure — in your case. . . . For example, it *did* disappoint me to learn that you are unhappy."

She would not admit that she had ever confessed this to him during their previous talks, and for a good while they gently battled with one another concerning what human happiness truly means, until Clarimond at last said, with an accent of mild irritation:

"For a man or woman of reasonable age there is but one perfect kind of happiness. The heart is a mill whose wheel should always turn in a full stream and grind forth golden grain. The soul, like a wealthy miller, must be buoyant and gladsome at the labor performed; the deeper he is covered with the dust of that delicious industry the more prosperous he rates himself while he looks forth on the world deified by his heart's consoling thrift."

"It is not everybody," smiled Kathleen, as the speaker paused, "who can be both king and poet in one short life."

"Are you now satirical, mademoiselle?"

"No, no, but I am skeptical. There are so few hearts like that. . . . Mine, I fear, is an idle mill-wheel above an empty stream-bed!"

"Yet one whose waters have been dried. Or, if not dried, cruelly dammed."

"I have not said that, monsieur."

"You say more, I find, than you mean to say."

"And yet you do not think me deceitful; you have granted as much."

His eyes for a instant seemed to caress her face. "I think you strangely miserable!" he affirmed. Then, lowering his voice a little, and leaning nearer to her: "I can't but wonder if you are incurably so."

"I am not miserable," she said, with wistful ardor of denial. "It is too bad that you should think this! You said something of the same sort yesterday. But you are wrong — wrong. I still have a great deal to live for."



"Still! And you say that, in the early glow of your maidenhood! *Still!* It is amazing. Or, no; it isn't amazing at all; it's thoroughly explainable. There is something you want. I wonder if I could get it for you."

She shook her head quickly, and then stared down at the hands which lay like two pale curled feathers in her lap. "No, monsieur," she breathed, enshrining the words, as it were, in a sort of long sigh. "It is nothing that you could get me."

He accepted her reply as a surrender. She *was* a sorrower, after all, and the feint of her assertion to the contrary had been admittedly futile.

In the silence that now followed they both looked forth upon the incomparable valley, flanked by its mighty mountains, over-scattered by its ethereal villas, crowned, accentuated, dignified by its romantic and imposing palace.

The King slowly lifted his hand and pointed to that pale and beauteous edifice. His voice was quite faint (though it reached her ears very clearly indeed) as he said:

"I have thought of offering you this for a home."

She did not make the slightest sign of reply. He saw the color leave her cheeks, and the light greaten in her eyes. But she did not turn her look toward his. Now her breath came visibly quicker, pulsing the spray of lace at her throat. Soon he saw her delicate hands flutter a little, there, in her lap, like fallen flowers that a breeze blows over and vaguely unsettles. But that was all.

"Yes," he went on. "I have thought of asking you to dwell there with me — as my wife."

At once she turned, and met his gaze with great directness.

"You . . . have had this thought, monsieur?"

"It is my wish — my request — my entreaty."

"Your wife?" she repeated; and he saw that she was deeply perturbed.

"My queen," he continued, "I want you to share my throne and crown with me, such as they are. I have never asked any woman to do this until now. I have never asked any woman, for the simplest of reasons. Need I tell you that reason?" He reached his hand forward and took her hand, lifting it to his lips. It had grown cold, piteously cold, and the kisses that he gave it were somehow bestowed with the compassionate tenderness which implied that he sought to re-awaken its natural warmth.

"Your queen, your queen," she said, and withdrew her hand, not rudely and yet with firmness. The color came back to her cheeks. As he watched her face, it seemed like a tea-rose in some delightful process of revivification, faint yet distinct.

"That is what I said," he answered, "and that is what I meant."

He watched her struggle with her agitation. It seemed to him cruel that he should do this, and yet it gave him a curious pleasure, just as if she were some oddly beautiful bird that revealed some touch of iridescent splendor beneath its wings every time they were fluttered.

But at length Kathleen, so to speak, fluttered her wings no more. "Monsieur," she said, with a kind of pathetic tranquillity, "there is—your mother."

"My mother will be no obstacle. I can and will prevent her from being one."

She hesitated a moment. "Then there are—there are (how shall I put it?) your traditions."

"I've trampled on a good many of them, as it is. . . . Come now, mademoiselle," he pursued, with a gruffness that would have frightened her if it had not ended in a smile, "you're going to throw me over, you're going to reject me—to (what is the right phrase?) send me about my business."

"No, no!" she exclaimed. Immediately, then, she rose and stretched out her right hand. "I will be your wife," she said, "and I thank you for the great honor you do me."

He also rose at this, and wrapped her with his embrace. . . . But something in her lips, her eyes, her look (he could not for his life have told just what) made him put her away at arm's length, intently scan her features, and then recoil several steps, touching her no longer.

"Your heart isn't in it!" he exclaimed. "You're giving yourself to me only because of your mother!"

Her eyes dilated frightenedly. "Oh, no, don't think that!" she cried.

"But I do think it—I must! Why not, when I read it, when I see it? Your heart is elsewhere, and you're willing to let me possess, if I will, the void that

marks where it once beat. Am I not right? Answer me, Kathleen. Am I not right?"

She burst into a passion of tears. "Yes, yes! I dare not lie to you! If you were not so good and fine I—I *might* lie; but you tear the truth from me! You saw my pain, my undying memory! You taxed me with them; you insisted that they haunted me, and I—I confessed that you were not wrong. But I am willing to be your wife. Willing? Oh, hear me, monsieur! Am I not absurd to phrase it like that? Only, it is best to be truthful. You, who are so sincere yourself, will understand, will pardon. If I had never known *him* it would have been so different! I could have loved you, then, with all my soul! I can imagine some good woman loving you that way. Perhaps it will come to me in time. You spoke of my mother. No, it is not she—not wholly she. Of course she wants such a marriage—what mother would not? I, myself, am proud to be your wife. Only, there is that other love, which will not die! Am I not wiser to let you know this? You can't blame me. I see now in your eyes that you do not blame me. I've never asked you if he has spoken of me; I've never wanted to know; it's quite over between us. . . . There, that is all. I go to you, now, without a guilty conscience. You know me just as I am. I've tried to crush it, but it would not be crushed. Suppose I had never said a word about it, and let you take me with a falsehood in my soul. Many a woman would have done that—almost every other woman in the world would have done it. But

I'm not vaunting my virtues ; I'm simply making a clean breast of things . . . don't you see ? You do see ; you must ! . . . There ; I dare say I'll be a worthy wife to you, monsieur, and I'm certain that I will be a very faithful and devoted one. As for a queen " (and she laughed wildly through her tears), "I may fail at that. It's such an undreamed-of part for me to play ! But I'll try ! I'll try hard, strengthened by your help !"

The tears were glistening on her cheeks as she put forth both hands to him. He took them, kissing them both ; and then, still holding them, he said : "Kathleen, you are a very noble and brave girl. I thank you sincerely for what you have told me. One easily multiplies words—you will understand just how grateful I feel. The evening of the ball is so near that a press of affairs may keep me from seeing you till then. But (as I said to you yesterday, if I mistake not) my carriage will be here at the hour named, to conduct your mother and yourself to the palace. *Au revoir* ; let everything rest undetermined, please, until we meet again."

She felt his lips touch her hand, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, before she could even be sure that he meant to leave her, he had vanished from the room.

She sank into a chair. Her heart was throbbing, and her head swam a little as she leaned it backward. In a few more seconds her mother shot into her presence by another door.

"Kathleen !"

"Well, mamma?"

"You've been crying! You're in tears yet! . . . What has happened? Is it arranged?"

"No; nothing is arranged. That is, if you mean" ——

"Good gracious! I hope you haven't quarreled!"

"We haven't quarreled."

"Thank Heaven!" . . . Mrs. Kennaird dropped at her daughter's feet, in a collapse oddly picturesque, considering her size and weight. But after all she was a woman who never dealt awkwardly with her avoirdupois, though just now carried away by an emotion which might well have imperiled gracefulness.

"Kathleen! Kathleen! Tell me, my darling! You can't be unkind enough *not* to tell me! Did he *mention* it? Did he say one single word *about* it? Now, my child, consider how I suffer! Don't torture me! Let me know *everything*!"

Kathleen regarded her mother for a moment, and then slipped both arms round her neck. "Mamma," she said, with a deceit born of pity, and also of that love which all the icy ambition, all the wordly striving, all the hard, harsh "American push" of her parent had never served to annul, "there is really nothing for you to know except that the King was very kind to me, very kind, and I—well, I became a little nervous. It seems like such a great ordeal, mamma, for me to open the ball with him. And yet he's good enough to insist that I will get through all right. He" ——

"All right!" cried Mrs. Kennaird, regaining her

feet with a phenomenal alacrity. "There won't be a woman in the ball-room who can hold a candle to you!"

At this same time, as it happened, Alonzo Lispenard was crossing the threshold of a small apartment, full of books, busts and a few rare pictures, where Eric Thaxter had passed many an hour of artistic musing.

Alonzo held a paper in his hand.

"You see," he said, after handing the paper to Eric and throwing himself into a chair at his friend's side, "my royal command for the state ball has actually come."

Eric merely glanced at the paper.

"Mine has just come, too," he said.

"What?" queried Alonzo. "Were you not invited till now?"

"No. It was that horrible Princess. Clarimond has been letting her have her head, but the other night he pulled her up with a short rein. I hear that she's now humility itself. I am naturally delighted. I've seen it coming, Lonz, but of course I could say nothing to the King."

"And . . . you will go to the ball?" said Alonzo, slowly.

"Go? Yes. It will be great fun to see the haughty old Brindisi dame deposed. She'll be obliged to beam on us. We will go together, and be beamed on in duo!"

"I cannot go, Eric!"

"Not go, Lonz? But you must!"

"Must!"

"You will insult the King. And remember, you are his"——

"Servant," struck in Alonzo, bitterly.

"Absurd! He, of all men, would hate that word of yours. Listen: I know everything that passed between you. I think, on the whole, that you behaved very well."

Alonzo gave a harsh little laugh. "It's a wonder you're willing to admit that!"

"Oh, I'm willing to fight for you, dear boy, when I think you're in the right. Clarimond, however, apologized."

"Yes; a king's apology."

"My dear Lonz, you're sulky."

Alonzo repeated his laugh. "What a queerly wrong kind of word from you, Eric, who usually pride yourself on the *not juste!*"

Eric smiled. "There's a great deal of talk about the right word in the right place, but it has always seemed to me that there should be in all cases at least five words to choose from; otherwise language becomes a pauper, and expression a mere joiner's mechanism."

Alonzo tossed his head. "This burst of brilliancy," he said, somberly, "leads to"——

"Another word in which to define your present mood——jealous."

Alonzo gave a great start. Then he tried to laugh, for the third time, and lamely failed. "Oh, that's cruel of you!" Here his brow clouded. "And, if I *am* jealous of a man like that!"



"A very noble and exceptional man, remember!"

"Oh, yes. But a man whose immense rank compromises Kathleen by the fact of his being in love with her."

Eric played for a moment with an ivory paper-cutter that had lain on the desk near which his friend had discovered him while deep in the solution of some new architectural problem.

"How do you know the King is in love with her?" he suddenly asked.

"Bah!" grumbled Alonzo. "How do I know I am I, you are you?"

"Well, granted that he is. Come, now, Lonz, you've known him long enough to feel, if not also to *know*, that he's a man who would scorn to treat any pure woman — Well," Eric went on, after a pause and a gesture, "to treat any pure woman as kings have too often done."

Alonzo gnawed his lip. "What on earth *will* he do, then, Eric? He *is* in love with her" —

"Every man is. I am. I've only seen her the least little bit, and yet" —

"Oh, seriously! He cannot marry her!"

"Can't he?"

"What *do* you mean?" cried Alonzo, jumping up from his chair as though something had stung him.

"Ah," said Eric, with voice cool and incisive, "I thought you had forever broken with her. How, then, can it wake your wrath if she should become the Queen of Saltravia?"

"It wouldn't, it wouldn't," muttered Alonzo, pale

and visibly distressed. "But if anything happens, Lonz, I pledge you my word *that* will happen! The King has done far more audacious things already than marry an American girl. As for a morganatic marriage" —

"Damn a morganatic marriage," cried Alonzo. "If he tried that, and she consented, I'd put a bullet through his brain though they hung me ten minutes afterward."

"They don't hang here; they guillotine," said Eric, calmly. "It's much neater, in a way. But you needn't covet any such poetic fate. Clarimond loathes morganatic unions, as he has more than once told me. . . . Lonz, Lonz! you know him too well by this time for such kind of talk! Here you are, rich through his generosity, and you talk of him as if he were some common cad."

"I'll resign my position!" quavered Alonzo, with both hands clenched at his side. "I'll go to starvation, if you please" —

"Don't. Go to the ball first."

"I'll send him my resignation this very day!"

"Wait until the ball is over."

"Damn the ball!"

"You're damning everything, it strikes me, in the most promiscuous manner."

"Forgive me, Eric, but I can't help it."

"You can't help it, dear boy," said Eric, "because your heart is almost breaking in your breast!" He got up from his chair, and went straight to his friend, putting his arms about his neck and kissing

him on the forehead. It was a very sweet and simple act, and it was also one that brimmed with a beautiful, spontaneous fraternity.

Alonzo threw back his head, stared forlornly at his companion, and then flung his head on Eric's broad, virile shoulder. A great, passionate turmoil of tears followed — the tears that men shed, and so tellingly seldom, and that are wrung, when shed at all, from deep-caverned wells of their spirits.

Eric held him in his arms, not speaking a word, only throbbing with the most humane sympathy. But meanwhile his brain worked, and he thought, with the bitterness and irony that certain stern freaks of life will too often wrench from us, whether we are optimists, pessimists, or only part of that huger throng which neither think nor feel too keenly:

“And I brought him here — for this! It's too devilishly bad! In a way he was happy enough till he'd seen her again, and now it's all a tumult with him, a madness, a torture. . . . But he'll stay for the ball. He'll stay just to see her again. And then — ? God knows with what reckless force he'll fly straight in the face of his present prosperity!”

## XII.

ERIC was right. On the evening of the ball, he and Alonzo sought the palace together. They entered the great room a little before ten o'clock.

Here the entire assembled court were waiting, and presently, to a golden clash of music from the orchestra on an upper balcony muffled in choice living flowers, the King entered with the Princess of Brindisi on his arm. It was a sight of extreme splendor. The enormous room, tapestried in gold-and-white, and hung with mirrors of huge size that reduplicated the chandeliers in endless glittering vistas, had been profusely adorned with roses, lilies and orchids from the royal hot-houses. The Saltravian nobles all wore their uniforms, and between the many beautiful ladies who were their wives a sumptuous kind of rivalry was to-night manifest, each one wishing, as it would seem, to eclipse the other in the glory of her jewels. But there were two ladies present who outshone them all, and these were the Princess herself and her cherished ward, Bianca d'Este. The mother of Clarimond was literally mailed in gems. Her stomacher and corslet of mingled rubies and diamonds blazed, as the light caught them, with vivid and luxurious fires. Her hair was oversprinkled with brilliants, and her neck and arms were aflame with them. Possessing so much natural presence and

carriage, she looked more than merely regal. Her worst foes (and there were two or three of these who now gazed at her with the most amiable demeanors) must have granted that she was altogether magnificent.

With Bianca d'Este it was quite an opposite affair. She, too, was magnificent, but in a way that became her maidenhood and her youth. A collar of pearls, five rows deep, engirt her throat, and these, with a cluster at her breast of sapphires, diamonds and other stones, in imitation of a spray of flowers, were the only jewels that she wore. But the pearls had belonged to her ancestress, Mary of Modena, Queen of England, and hence were not only superb but historic besides. As for the matchless bouquet, it was owned by her mother, was famous throughout Europe, and worth a handsome fortune in itself. The Princess having begged Bianca's mother by letter to permit the girl to wear it on this special occasion, it had been sent from Italy under the guardianship of five trusted men, who now waited in one of the halls of the palace and would receive the glorious bauble from the hands of its wearer the instant that she quitted the ball-room.

Shortly after the entrance of Clarimond and his mother the royal quadrille was danced, and to some conservative watchers, when they beheld the King lead forth Kathleen as his partner, the sight was one of absolute horror. Everybody else in the quadrille was of the blood royal except this upstart young American. Beautiful? Yes, amazingly so. Her

beauty, in its perfect plainness of apparel, dimmed the fire of all those necklaces, bracelets and tiaras. With such eyes, with such a heavenly look about the brows, with such a slope of the arm and shoulder, and with that imperial kind of daintiness in her motion, she made every other woman look artificial, got up for the occasion, *endimanchée*. But what (*que diable!*) had that to do with the King's behavior? Whether she were hag or houri, why should he make her an excuse for smashing etiquette and then dancing on its *débris*? The thing was too idiotic. Did he mean to marry her? Was this to be his latest daring deed of unconventionalism?

"Look at him now," whispered a lady of highest rank to a gentleman equally lofty, after a pause had followed the first general dance. "He has those two Americans at his side, Eric Thaxter and Monsieur Lispenard. What a revolution he has wrought in his mother! The Princess is talking to them both, and smiling her blandest."

"Oh, that poor old Princess!" giggled the gentleman. "Was there ever such an overthrow? They say that he gave her her choice, the other night, after he had sent us all adrift like a pack of school-children, and treated poor Philibert so awfully. Either she had to pull down her flag and fold it discreetly away, just as she's doing now, or leave the country inside of twenty-four hours."

"But *is* it true," asked the lady, "that this American girl was once betrothed to Monsieur Lispenard?"

"You know what happened here on the palace grounds," was the reply. "He saw her and ran off in an agony of embarrassment, followed by his friend."

"Perhaps they had been married and then divorced," said the lady. "I have it on the best of authority that people in America marry there in one province (let us say Venezuela) this year, and are divorced with perfect ease the next year in some other province — let us say California."

"Really? I am not surprised. Americans are such curious creatures. But she's wonderfully handsome, that girl; don't you think so?"

"Oh, of course," granted the lady, saying no more, and saying even thus much as though it were forced from her. "But I don't like the affected simplicity with which she has gowned herself; do you?"

"I hadn't thought a bit about her attire," said the gentleman. . . . "Where is she now? Do you know?"

"Talking to a score or so of our best men," returned the lady, a little harshly, "over yonder near the door that leads to the picture-galleries. Take me in that direction, will you? I want to have a better look at her. I *may* be wrong, but it struck me there was a sort of crookedness in one of her eyebrows." . . .

Meanwhile, as the Princess of Brindisi, subdued into a humility that she had never before dreamed of as possible to her proud spirit, was saying suave if rather void things to Alonzo, the King slipped his arm within that of Eric Thaxter and murmured to him :

"Come with me, my friend, into the conservatory. I have something that I must say to you at once."

Clarimond and his companion were presently in the sweet-smelling dusk of a spacious glass pavilion, where you heard the sound of falling water and caught its flashes, now and then, through coverts of shadowy leaves and blooms. They found the place quite vacant; as yet no flushed and fatigued dancers had sought it. Their feet struck with little hollow clangs on the marble pavements of the odorous avenues, and thus accentuated, as it were, the exceeding stillness. It was a stillness that Eric waited for his master to break, and at length he did so, in these words:

"I suppose that Lispenard told you just what passed between him and myself."

"Yes, monsieur; he told me."

"Well," said the King, musingly; "then you, Eric, who know me so well, must have seen that I—betrayed myself."

"Betrayed yourself, monsieur! How?"

"Oh, that I showed him I loved the woman he loves. Did he not tell you that? No, do not reply; I will not permit you to tell *me*, even if so inclined. It would be unfair, almost dishonorable, for me to insist on any such disclosure."

"And injustice from you, monsieur, would be as impossible as darkness from the sun."

The King suddenly paused. His face was touched with vague yet revealing light, and Eric perceived on it a pallor, a seriousness, which he had before noted, but which now seemed intensified.



"If I wanted a counselor!" he broke forth. And then he laid a hand on Eric's shoulder. "But in this case I ought not to want one; I should be sufficient unto myself. Only, my friend, you would be the wisest and best of counselors; that is all I mean." And he withdrew his hand, giving a long and deep sigh.

"From what I know of you, monsieur," said Eric, "you have always been sufficient unto yourself."

"Not always, not always. . . . But you are very kind."

"I'm simply sincere, monsieur. You were born to be a great ruler of men. I have felt it for months past. The more that I see of you the more strongly you appeal to me as a power for good. The world would have had no need for republics if all kings had been as perfect as yourself."

"Thanks, my Eric — thanks."

To the surprise of his hearer these words were very brokenly uttered. Clarimond remained immovable, so that the revealing light still clothed his face. And now Eric saw that his vivid eyes were shining as though with half-repressed tears.

Only a slight silence elapsed before he spoke again.

"Then, if I am indeed worthy to be a great ruler, as you say, I should know, Eric, how to rule myself."

"Pardon me, monsieur, but I do not understand."

The King's glance turned from right to left, as though in the dimness he suspected either some newcomer or some ambushed listener. With great abruptness he soon caught both Eric's hands in his own,

and held them strainingly, while his moist-beaming eyes plunged their look into the obscured face of his watcher.

"Eric, I have never loved living woman until now, and I could have *her* for my wife if I chose!"

"For your . . . queen?" faltered Eric, scarcely knowing why he spoke the words.

"Queen, queen!" Clarimond flung back impatiently. *Dame!* you are like everybody else! How otherwise *could* I have her for my wife, man? Have I not told you that those morganatic marriages are loathsome to me? But there it is! Instantly that 'royalty' idea occurs to you! Well, you are not to blame. It occurs to everybody, no doubt, the moment my marriage is thought of. It occurred to her. She accepted me. Are you smiling because she accepted me? Are you saying to yourself that she merely did what thousands of women would, in like circumstances, do? But you are wrong if you reason so, for she was sublimely frank. She made it clear to me that she still loved Lisperard, and that if she brought me a virgin body she could not bring me a virgin heart!"

"She said this, monsieur?"

"In substance, yes, Eric, if not in actual phrase. And I, knowing how this man and woman love one another—how the cruel worldliness of a single hard-grained being has kept them apart—I, whom you have called great, pause, positively pause, before the fulfillment of my duty!"

"Your duty, monsieur?"

The King's eyes darted fire, for a second, there in the dusk where he and Eric stood. "I can unite them, if I choose, almost by lifting my hand. If I do not choose, I can wed Kathleen. Which course is my duty? She will marry me, half from ambition, half because of her mother—that vicious, mannish, insatiable mother! Which course, I say, is my duty? People talk of Quixotism! Bah! as if I did not know! There was never a meaner word created than that 'Quixotism'! It has been the cloak for countless acts of cowardice, and Cervantes, were he alive to-day, would regret that his genius ever aided in its coining."

Eric drooped his head, and felt his eyes fill with tears. He knew just what great throbs of a noble nature underlay this splendid bluster, this incomparable vehemence.

"Monsieur," he replied, when able to school his voice so that he could speak with self-governance, "you have been very right in saying that you require no counselor. I am Alonzo Lisperard's friend; I know how he has suffered—how he suffers yet! I am your devoted servitor, and I realize the fine renunciation it is in your power to make. You yourself have hinted that you are capable of this self-effacement. But I did not need your own admission to that effect. I have already known you too long not to grasp the height and breadth of your generosity."

Clarimond turned on his heel like a flash, threw

both hands behind him, joining them there, and then moved slowly away.

"I've horribly deceived you," he shot over his shoulder. "I brought you here in the hope that, although an American, you would prove yourself a good courtier, and show me ample cause that I should plight troth with the woman I love."

"Monsieur," replied Eric, following him, "I am far too good a courtier for that! Sincerely as I esteem your character in its entirety, there is one element of it to which I must always pay primal obedience."

"You mean?" questioned the King, as Eric now reached his side again, in the fragrant twilight of their transient retreat.

"Your peerless conscience—your unparalleled sense of right!" . . .

As the festivity progressed, this evening, nearly every one conceded that there had been nothing at all resembling it in brilliance and buoyancy for many and many a month. Indeed, some of the native guests roundly admitted that Clarimond's reign had yet seen no grand assemblage so delightful; for this season more foreigners than usual had gathered at the hotels, and among these, where position and antecedents made it possible, the royal invitations had been somewhat lavishly spread. As a pleasant result, the entertainment sparkled with novelty. At midnight the doors of the banqueting-hall were opened, and wine and viands, furnished in profuse largess, wrought just the needed result of quickened

gayety and enlivened social zest. The haughtiest Saltravian maids and matrons unbent and became affable to fellow-mortals of different grades or often of different countries from their own. Admiration for Kathleen's beauty waxed with the progress of the entertainment, and after a while many ladies sought to know her. Mrs. Kennaird, who had managed to get herself approached and talked to by some of the most prominent men present, was in an ecstasy of self-gratulation. She had once come face to face with Alonzo, and had managed to make it appear as if she had not intentionally cut him. It was so hard to treat any one unamiably to-night!

Some little time after midnight Eric touched Alonzo on the arm. The latter gave a kind of relieved start, and at once said :

"I'm so glad to find you. I mean to slip away, though, of course, you will not go yet."

"You are tired so soon?"

"Yes—of seeing *her*, ringed round with her new idolators. It's getting intolerable. I shouldn't have come at all."

"But, my dear Lonz, the King wishes to speak with you. He has just sent me to ask you if you will not join him."

Alonzo stood for a brief while irresolute. Then he tossed his head, bit his lip, and said, in a voice almost irritable :

"Of course, of course. How absurd of me! I'm almost forgetting that I'm a slave."

"A slave, Lonz! You! As if I'd let you be!

Come now, take that horrible sentiment back. You're as free as air, and you know it."

Alonzo slipped his hand into Eric's. "I'm very distressed," he answered, "and I'm a fool. Forgive me."

"It isn't for me to forgive you."

"Oh, then I'll apologize to *him*."

"You needn't. He'll never know. Come with me, dear boy."

They quitted the ball-room and passed through several dim corridors. "Where on earth are you taking me?" Alonzo murmured more than once; but Eric, as if the question needed no reply, kept pushing on. Presently, when it was for the third time repeated, he replied, while pushing open a vague door over which was a lamp shaped like a drooping lotos-flower :

"You ought to know. It's that little chapel. You told me, when I brought you here one day, an age ago, that it was very good. You congratulated me on it, though you pronounced it a plagiarism from the *Sainte Chapelle* in Paris. It isn't, for the simple reason that it's a copy."

"I remember," fell from Alonzo, as he stood in the full-lighted interior and gazed about him. As in the *Sainte Chapelle*, there were fifteen windows of superfine stained glass, with their designs from Scripture and the lives of the saints, blossoming out of lovely traceries ; there were the same polychrome adornments, and the same statues of the twelve Apostles over against the pillars.

"It was so different when I saw it last," Alonzo continued. "The sunshine then flooded it, and now there are these radiant candelabra, brimming at intervals with wax candles. Why is it thus illumined? What has this dreamy little place to do with all that mundane and dazzling revel that we have just left?"

"It has but recently been lighted, as you will see," said Eric, pointing to a cluster of candles near by. "The King desired this."

"One of his whims, I suppose."

"He has no *whims*."

"Does he attend service here?"

"Clarimond? My dear Lonz, you know by this time as well as I do that the King has no distinct religious creed. He has given the use of this chapel to his mother during her stay here; the Princess's apartments are not far away from it. I have heard him say that if he should ever be married, his friend Doctor Wouvermann, whom you already know, should perform the ceremony here between these walls. It will be a new shock to conservatism, of course; for that kindly and intellectual old German, Wouvermann, is a thorn in the side of the recognized Saltravian clergy. . . . But here is the King, now. He is coming to meet you."

Clarimond was indeed advancing toward them, along the central aisle. As Alonzo's eyes met his face its excessive pallor challenged notice. The King extended his hand to Eric's friend, and its flesh felt so icily cold to him that he almost recoiled with a cry.

"Thank you for coming," he said. "I wish to hold a little talk with you, if you will let me." Then he nodded to Eric, and swiftly added :

"Leave us, please, and carry out my other request. I am sure that you will succeed. And pray do not forget that you may freely use my name, sanction and authority."

With a bow Eric Thaxter mutely departed, while Alonzo and his master stood together, in the silence and mellow splendor of the charming chapel. . . . It may have been a half-hour later when he returned, accompanied by a lady. The chapel was then quite vacant again, and the lady gave a little joyful cry as she looked about her.

"Oh, this is so lovely ! And you say that the King wishes to see me here ?"

Then it seemed to Kathleen as if the King's presence was somehow resolved from out the glimmering softness of the place ; and while he drew near to her, Eric disappeared.

"You are very good to come," said Clarimond. "I saw how they flocked about you, there in the ball-room. No doubt it was annoying to desert your scene of conquest."

"No, monsieur. I came at your bidding."

He smiled, and now she saw how very pale and sorrowful his face was—how it plainly betokened some severe trial, though of course she could not conjecture what.

"You are to do something more at my bidding," he said ; "that is, if you will."



"If it lies in my power, monsieur," — she began, and then paused, wondering and alarmed because his mien was so full of that strange, repressed despair.

"I hope it will be within your desire as well," he answered. "If it does not you need by no means rate it as an act of obedience." At this the King raised his hand, as if in signal to some one at the further end of the chapel. Kathleen noted the gesture, and presently receded, trembling.

"*He*, monsieur! I — I did not expect this!"

"Do not refuse to see him," said Clarimond, with great gentleness.

While Kathleen stood, half defiant, half acquiescent, Alonzo came nearer, pausing at her side.

"Kathleen," he said, "may I speak to you? The King, with untold goodness, has given me this happy chance. I fear you are very angry at me. I think you have every right to be."

"I — I am not angry," breathed Kathleen. In her consternation, her piteous confusion, she had never looked lovelier than now. "You, monsieur," she said, with a sudden tearful fierceness to the King, "have told him what I told *you*!"

"Every word," smiled Clarimond. . . . And then, as Alonzo caught her hand and stooped over it, raining upon it kisses, the King moved away, leaving them side by side. . .

In a small sacristy, a few yards beyond the chancel, he soon came face to face with Eric Thaxter.

"Monsieur," exclaimed Eric, with a sort of rever-

ent whisper, "you are doing the noblest act of your life!"

"That is easily said," was the reply, "since my life has not yet been a long one, and few of its opportunities for good deeds have been at all amply exploited."

"Ah, do not say that! Thousands of your poor would certainly show gratitude enough to deny it. . . . But you are suffering terribly. This strain that you undergo is reflected in your face."

Clarimond sank into a chair. "Yes," he said, in a muffled kind of voice, "I am suffering a great deal. The pull, the wrench, is harder than I fancied." As he fixed his eyes upon Eric's face they seemed to ray forth spiritual grandeur. "My friend, I had no other course than this. There are things that a man must do just because he is a man. But if he be a king as well, then the obligation grows double. We have often spoken together on this question of the rights of kings. You know how I despise them — how they strike me as but a mildewed survival of ancient error. Yet there has always seemed to me something grand, nevertheless, in the idea of a king who could govern himself perfectly while governing his people as well. Then he ceases to represent mere royalty, and becomes vested with a tender yet rugged paternity. In those rare historic cases where some such human union has existed crowned and throned, I should say that the possible sacredness and dignity of kings have found their sole true medium of expression. . . . You have seen Doctor Wouvermann?"

"Yes, monsieur. Luckily I met him just as he

was leaving the ball-room, which he smilingly told me was no fit place for a clergyman."

"We may count on him, then?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur."

"The signal from Lispenard is to be a few tinkles of that little silver bell on the altar."

"You mean, if she consents?"

"If she consents—yes. If not, he will simply come to me and tell me of his failure, after having conducted her back to the ball. . . . I hope," Clarimond continued, "that she *will* consent to let Doctor Wouvermann marry them to-night. They have both been through so much heart-breaking tribulation! And if, as you suggest, Madame Kennaird has certain more ambitious views for her child, that lady will doubtless oppose their marriage in the future with a new zeal born of chagrin. She appears already to have brewed for both of them a prodigious amount of misery. From all that I can learn, her interference has risen between them like a column of thick fume, through which they have viewed, distortedly, one another's acts. Her influence has been that of malignancy, and I shall regret if she remains in Saltravia, provided her daughter (as the wife of Lispenard) shall so choose. But what am I saying, my dear Eric? Lispenard may choose to resign his office . . . who can tell?"

"I am certain that he will *not* resign it, monsieur!" cried Eric. "I am certain, too, that he feels, this hour, as I feel. I am certain he realizes, as I do, that

you are the soul and center of all that is self-abnegating, grandly generous."

"Thanks, Eric; those words are surely rich in encouragement. You know I do not care for eulogy; but when one strives toward an ideal of conduct, as I strive now, the cheer of a loved friend is like a warm hand-clasp in chilly darkness." . . .

Just then a little silvery sound reached their ears. Clarimond sprang to his feet. Eric saw his lips twitch, and his hands for a brief instant clench themselves at his sides.

"The signal," he said. "She has consented. Go for Doctor Wouvermann. You will be witness, you know, Eric; and I" — he smiled, but to his observer the smile teemed with a terrible melancholy — "*I shall give the bride away.*"

In the ball-room they had begun to miss the King. When at last he appeared it was in company with Kathleen, Eric and Alonzo. The floor was full of dancers; conversation, stimulated by rare and copious wines, reigned in merry babbles that almost threatened to drown the music.

Clarimond went to his mother, who sat talking with several gentlemen. Bianca d'Este, also seated, was at her side. The gentlemen slightly withdrew as he approached, making a lane for him while he mounted to the low *estrade* where these ladies were placed.

"You are not looking well," murmured the Princess to him. "Others have spoken of it. I do so hope,

however, that your looks mean nothing serious. Bianca, here, has been quite anxious. Is it not true, my darling?" And the Princess, taking the Italian girl's hand, drew her forward a little, the marvelous *corsage* of precious stones giving forth jets of multicolored light as she moved.

"Yes, yes," fell from Bianca. "We were both greatly worried!"

Clarimond sent a kindly glance straight into her blue, solicitous eyes. As he did so, it flashed through his mind:

"I will never love any other woman as long as I live. But this maiden might make me the worthiest of queens, the truest of wives. One day I may ask her hand—provided my mother preserves her present change from arrogance to kindness. *But not now!* Now it would be a horror!"

Mrs. Kenraird, during supper, had received with furtive tingles of delight the attentions of an Austrian archduke and a Russian ambassador. She had not noticed Kathleen's absence. The archduke, who was past sixty but still handsome and of the suavest manners, had whispered in her ear that King Clarimond, who did whatever he chose, might perhaps do himself the honor to request the hand of her divine daughter. The elderly Russian ambassador, overhearing this remark as he presented her with an ice and a glass of champagne, declared that his royal master would never have gone to Denmark for a bride

if he had had the delight of seeing "*mademoiselle, votre fille.*"

"Ah, Prince," cried Mrs. Kennaird, in her most genial trebles and with her very acceptable if imperfect French, "there has never yet been an American queen, and I imagine there never will be! My poor, innocent child has never dreamed of such an honor, and . . . really . . . if it were offered her she would hardly know how to wear it."

The Austrian and Russian exchanged glances. They were both men of very high rank, and it is probable that they abhorred the tenets of Clarimond while respecting and perhaps even loving his character. That he should marry an American girl, though her beauty were brighter than the Spartan Helen's and her breeding beyond a Récamier's, no doubt struck them both as the essence of the ridiculous. But while they may (or may not) have thus quickly and tacitly told one another their mutual contempt and disapprobation, Kathleen suddenly appeared, with Alonzo in her wake.

Kathleen the wife felt far bolder than if she were still Kathleen the unwedded. Or perhaps, because she was herself so intoxicated by joy, it seemed to her as if a few words, delivered aside to her mother, might soften the sense of calamity they imparted.

This, however, was not true. Mrs. Kennaird heard her low-voiced tidings, and shivered as though an arctic blast had invaded the ball-room. . . .

Meanwhile the ball went on, eddying, whirling, billowing, in that ecstasy of dance beloved by the young

of opposite sexes. The sweet, wild moans of the violins were raucous screeches in the ears of Mrs. Kennaird now, but in other feminine ears they were tender melodies of promise, of elation, of delicious inebriety.

Bianca d'Este heard them, and hoped. The Princess of Brindisi heard them, and half hoped, half doubted. Eric Thaxter heard them, and sighed, because of that mystic and grievous Parisian past concerning which he had perchance by this time spoken still more disclosingly to his dearest friend. Clarimond, King of Saltravia, heard them, and thrilled with the pain of sacrifice, though gladdened by that sense of self-conquest which is the sweet wages of honor, as a sense of self-debasement is the bitter wages of sin.

Alonzo and Kathleen heard them, and the voluminous cadences they breathed built for both heavenly castles of expectancy.

And so the music played on—music which so throbs, when art is its minister, with souvenirs and prophecies, memories and anticipations! . . .

Angry, austere, choked with a passionate feeling of defeat and insult, Mrs. Kennaird stood beside her daughter, a half hour or so later that night, when Alonzo laid his hand in the hand of Kathleen. The two ladies were waiting for their carriage, cloaked and ready, at the portals of the palace.

"Good-by, good-by," Alonzo said, "till to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow!" Kathleen repeated.

"Till to-morrow, *my wife!*"

"Till to-morrow, *husband!*"

Mrs. Kennaird had overheard the two last murmurs of farewell. With her face pale and full of nervous tremor, she moved toward Alonzo.

"I'll never forgive you," she gasped—"never! You've kept her from a crown—a throne!"

Stung, vexed, Alonzo was about to reply; but Kathleen caught her mother by the wrist, and with the same ardor of self-assertion which had more than once repelled the spirit of even this woman's unsurpassable worldliness and ambition, she hurried in eager whisper:

"He gives me, mamma, all the crown I want—his love! He gives me all the throne I want—his name and protection!"

THE END.



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